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THE

MIRACLES OF JESUS

AS

MARKS OF THE WAY OF LIFE

BY THE MOST REV.

COSMO GORDON LANG

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PREFACE

THE purpose of this book is neither critical nor apologetic. It assumes the substantial accuracy of the Gospel narratives. It does not attempt to deal with the philosophy or the evidences of the Miracles. It deals with them simply as one of Christ's methods of teaching the principles of a true life.

Though it is thus limited and practical in its purpose, it may I hope be read by some who have doubts concerning the assumptions which it cannot discuss; for

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it has been written with a very real sense of the difficulties both of faith and of life.

The chapters originally appeared as the Sunday Readings in the *Good Words* Magazine. I have not been able to find time to modify, enlarge, or improve them. This fact will partially explain repetitions of thought or even phrase almost inevitable in papers written from time to time for the purposes of a monthly periodical. Other only too obvious faults are the results of the hurry and distractions from which the vicar of a parish of nearly fifty thousand people must necessarily suffer.

I have not, directly, consulted any other literature than the Gospels themselves. I have simply tried to let them speak their

own message to me, and to transmit that message, with whatever imperfections, to my readers.

C. G. LANG.

THE VICARAGE, PORTSEA.
October 1900.

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THE MEANING OF THE MIRACLES

THE MEANING OF THE MIRACLES

THE Miracles of Jesus were not so much evidences as parts of His Revelation. They were themselves disclosures in deed of the motives, the laws, the ends by which all things are ordered by God. They were lights let in upon the darkness of divine Providence. The truth that the Spirit of the universe—of whom, through whom, in whom, to whom are all things—is a Personal Being, and that His creation is ordered for what we call "moral" ends, is one which we must hold by faith: evidence can support, but cannot give it. For *sight* of it—clear, complete, final—we must wait for the Day of Light. The so-called

"miracles," which accompanied the presence here on this darkened earth of God made manifest in the flesh, were anticipations of the final enlightening. They were hints given by God Himself of His else veiled purposes, sufficient to vindicate and sustain our faith. They were lessons taught in facts by the divine Teacher, of the final truth of things; fragmentary glimpses of the hidden secret of the universe. Human eyes were permitted to behold the forces of wind and sea, the mysterious laws of disease and death, in the grasp of a Power who is a Person and a Will of love, to behold them manifestly ordered by Him for the good of man. That instinct of faith which penetrates through the mystery of the laws of the universe, of the inscrutable course of things—a mystery eluding observation and baffling reason—and reaches a personal will, not less supreme than good, was vindicated by the Miracles of God incarnate. Jesus healing the sick, raising the dead, stilling the storm, feeding the multitude—Jesus was Providence made plain. Each

miracle, then, is not only an instance of the loving kindness of Jesus to those who at the time appealed to Him for it, but a revelation of the will of God, of the purpose of His ceaseless Providence. It teaches His purpose as well as proves His power. We see in it infinite power shaping the course of things for the good of a human soul. It shows us what we mean when we speak in the language of faith of "the ordering of all things for our good"—shows us, too, that if this is the language of children, it is the language of children who in their simplicity see deep and far into truth. When, therefore, we ask of each miracle what it has to teach us, we are not indulging in mere edifying fancy, we are following the very reason for which it was done; we are treating it as God meant it—as a sign of the way in which His Providence is ever guiding men, as a lesson of the divine method of dealing with human life.

Moreover, we are being taught in many ways that human life — bodily, mental, spiritual—is not separated as it were into

distinct compartments, but that it is a unity in itself. The lower forms of it exist for the sake of, and find their true end in, the higher. The laws which regulate the body have their analogies in the laws which regulate the soul. Both come from the same source, express the same will, work for the same end—a whole life realising perfectly the idea of it in the Divine Mind. This truth underlies the Miracles of Jesus. It is plain that He did not heal the body only in order to relieve suffering or cure disease, or to gain an authority which would enable Him to heal the soul; but also in order that men should learn from the way in which He healed the body the way in which the soul also must find its healing. If this be so, we are right in treating the Miracles as signs of the way in which our human life is to be set free from its disorders and to fulfil the purpose of God who gave it.

We shall in these pages try to learn some of the abiding lessons of the Miracles. We shall try to realise them as they *were*, and to

understand them as they *are*. We are first to picture the human, momentary scene, then to learn some of the divine, eternal truths which it revealed. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to take of the things of Jesus and show them to us—to take the lasting truth out of the temporary form in which it was at first revealed and bring it home to our own life and experience. We discern this work of the Spirit in the *words* of Jesus. Spoken though they were by human lips to human ears at a long past period of this world's history, still, when we read or hear them, they touch the mind, the will, the conscience with the force and freshness of a living voice. Still and for ever they are words of eternal life. So also must it be with the *deeds* of Jesus. Done once in act, in meaning they are eternal. The Holy Spirit takes the record of the act, and reveals to us the will of the ever-living Jesus of which it was once the expression. So the deed is for ever done for *us*; our experience is brought within its teaching. As we read the story of the miracle itself, let

us ask the Divine Spirit who in Jesus wrought it, and in the words of the Gospel has recorded it, to enlighten the eyes of our mind, that we may see and know the truth which He means it to have for *us!*

THE WATER MADE WINE

St. John ii. 1

THE WATER MADE WINE

St. John ii. 1

I. JESUS AT THE MARRIAGE FEAST

We can never cease to be surprised at the simplicity and straightforwardness with which the Gospels put before us the reality of our Lord's human nature. It is not obtruded, or insisted upon; it is simply assumed. This is indeed equally true of their presentment of His divine nature. If we think of it quietly, surely there is something wonderful in what we may call the unconscious audacity of these records—the quiet, almost matter-of-fact way in which they blend together two apparently so opposite conceptions: Jesus as man and Jesus as God.

There is a naturalness about it which seems to make the idea of their authors setting about to illustrate a doctrine a literary impossibility. Their treatment of two ideas so hard to combine in thought seems inconceivable unless they had seen them fused in a real and actual life. Thus in this story of the marriage feast of Cana the natural and the supernatural are blended with a simplicity which is beyond the skill of art.

Consider, then, how real and recognisable is the humanity here portrayed. It is a very homely village feast—in an atmosphere of frank conviviality. Notice the obvious distress when the supply of wine falls short of the demand; the hilarity of the ruler's words to the bridegroom when the good wine unexpectedly appears — perhaps the only words approaching a jest in the whole New Testament. Quite plainly there is no suggestion of constraint, of the presence of anything strange and awful, in the whole scene. Yet one of the guests was the Son of God. "Jesus was bidden, and His disciples, to the

marriage." How real and entire must have been the humanity which made such an invitation possible! He was the friend and neighbour of these village folk. For thirty years He had been coming and going among them, yet they had discerned nothing in Him that would make it strange to invite Him to share the innocent conviviality of their feast. There was nothing in His presence there that would seem to them incongruous. There was nothing in their simple mirth that He would disown. Nay; He used His divine power to help it—to remove a difficulty which might have spoiled it. It was thus, says St. John, that "He manifested His glory." Truly—they are His own words, else we would have shrunk from using them — "the Son of Man came eating and drinking."

The Son of Man — with what surprising simplicity this scene vindicates His title! It brings Him to us in the familiar intimacies of social intercourse. The Christian household is to regard Him as the unseen guest at every

meal, the unseen hearer of every conversation. Yet this thought is not to bring any atmosphere of constraint and severity: it is not to check the readiness or cloud the brightness of untainted mirth. The Puritan can never have meditated on this story of the marriage feast at Cana. It teaches us that it is not mirth that His presence banishes, but only the evil—the foolishness or self-indulgence—that corrupts it. Jesus can be with us—let us say it with a reverent boldness—even in our laughter.

Laughter—the laughter that takes us out of ourselves, that spreads its gaiety and lightens the burden of life—and the humour which provokes it, are among God's choicest gifts. He who has created and surely rejoices in "the much laughing sea," and the mirth of the birds among the trees in the spring morning, will not disown the laughter of His children. There is a time to laugh as well as a time to weep; and the Son of Man, who shared our tears on the way to the grave of Lazarus and the Cross of Calvary, shared

also our mirth at the feast of Cana. All the faculties of life are to be, not suspected, but redeemed from evil by the Christian; and one of the richest and happiest is the faculty of mirth. Our duty is, not to check its brightness, but to keep its innocence; and surely in the laughter that is like the laughter of the child, of the sunlight and the birds, God is well pleased.

II. JESUS AND HIS MOTHER

One shadow crosses the brightness of that scene at Cana. There is one touch of gentle severity—Jesus' quiet rebuke of His mother. With a woman's ready insight she had discerned the little failure in household management which threatened to spoil the success of the feast. In the happy days at Nazareth she had doubtless often turned for help to the sympathy of her Son. In ways not revealed to us He had often, doubtless, given her help in her own household cares that

recalled the mystery of His birth. So now "when the wine failed the mother of Jesus saith unto Him, 'They have no wine.' Jesus saith unto her, 'Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come.'" There was no harshness in the words: the appearance of it is due simply to the Greek word, which it is difficult to translate into English. But, however gentle and respectful, it was a rebuke. Her words perhaps seemed to imply some mother's right to influence His acts. She must be taught that the old days of "subjection" were over; that He had now to realise the wider aims and deeper purposes of His own divine mission; that His acts were now to be controlled by its supreme necessities. "Mine hour is not yet come." Perhaps there was a trace of presumption in the words or manner of Mary—though one hesitates to use the term—of presuming too far on the rights which her relationship seemed to give her. She must be reminded that between her and Him there was a deep mysterious gulf. "Woman,

what is there between me and thee?" Yet who shall venture to explain these glimpses into that wonderful guidance—so gentle, so pathetic—by which the Blessed Mother learned to realise that her Son was also her Lord?

One practical thought for ourselves, however, we may be permitted to gather from this gentle rebuke. It is one of the marks of a wise parent—most sure, yet most difficult of attainment—to discern betimes the period when the child's life must pass beyond the parent's immediate control. The hand of loving care which has guided the child's younger life may, if it linger on him too long and too fondly, thwart and hinder his own development. Every child has its own way to take—a way unknown to the parent, often leading to regions in which the parent is bewildered and ill at ease. The child after all is not so much God's gift as God's loan—an embodiment of a wholly separate purpose of God entrusted for a time to the parents' guidance. It is hard for them to discern,

harder still to accept, the moment when that time has reached its limit, and the child must go forth in the way of its own destiny. Yet failure in this discernment is a fruitful cause of family misunderstandings. The father insists on keeping his boy within the lines of some career which he has designed for him, and resents the boy's desire to wander outside of them. The mother expects the growing daughter to share her own ideas and conform to her own customs, and is distressed at the signs of independence. So the living hand of help and guidance becomes the dead hand of mere restraint. The bonds of love become irksome chains. No parent can tie up the life of a child in the limits of his own preconceived desires and ideas. Wise love will not seek to prolong subjection, but to prepare for freedom. The true economy of the nest is to fit the young bird for flight. When the time comes, and the children show in thoughts and ambitions the warning signs that the call of their separate destiny is beginning to reveal itself, the parent must open the door,

bid them God-speed, and let them go. After all, that new land is not strange to their Heavenly Father: He will be with them there. The human fatherhood must surrender its trust to the divine. Love reaches its height in sacrifice; and parent's love in the sacrifice of its restraints. But the sacrifice will lose its bitterness when it becomes an offering of the child to the love of God from which he came, and beyond which he cannot wander.

III. THE WATER AND THE WINE OF LIFE

By the supremacy of His Divine Spirit Jesus converted the water into wine. By this "sign," says St. John, He "manifested His glory." The glory was not merely in the display of power, but in the inward meaning of the act. For every act of the Eternal Truth in time was a symbol—the manifestation of an inner divine, eternal glory. So considered this act was a symbol of the whole

life of Jesus. It was a symbol of the Incarnation. He took the water of our human life, and by the supremacy of His Spirit converted it into the wine of the divine life. He came down to our fallen humanity, and raised it again to God. By taking our manhood upon Him He "took it unto God." Thus He dignified every part and faculty of it; He stamped it for ever with the pledge of its divine possibility. The flesh is no longer vile, since He wore it. Suffering is no longer merely sad, since He consecrated it. Our sin is no longer hopeless, since He bore it, and by bearing covered it with forgiveness. He converted human life by living it. As was the Master, so is the disciple to be. He has given us His Spirit, and by His Spirit we are the inheritors and associates of His conversion of life. The Spirit of Jesus in us, His members, is to manifest His glory by enabling us always to turn our water into wine.

The wine did not simply come: the water became it. That is the divine method.

When Christ came He did not come in a new order of being: He came in the flesh, a man. It was just this real and actual human nature that He made divine. We are to follow that divine method. We are to take the water as we find it and convert it into wine. It may seem in itself most alien to this better use. The water in these jars at Cana must have seemed the very opposite of the wine that was desired. Our lives and circumstances—the world we live in—may seem singularly incapable of fulfilling a divine purpose; yet it is through these and not otherwise that the divine purpose is to be fulfilled. The supremacy of the Spirit of Jesus suffices. The artist, whatever his dreams and ideals of beauty may be, does not quarrel with this world and wait for another. He sets to work with the lines and colours that he finds, and by the supremacy of his artist-spirit realises his ideal through them. It may only be a peasant scything the grass that he sees; but behold just there the rhythm of movement. It may only be the corner of an obscure

stream; but behold just there the wonders of light and shadow. The Christian is the true artist of life. He takes what he finds in the lot he shares with ordinary men—of sorrow and joy, of labour and rest, of success and failure, of capacities and incapacities. He does not quarrel with it; he does not change it. But by the supremacy of the spirit which the Lord of Life gives him, he converts it into the sphere of a noble and God-ward life. It is not too much to say that the main business of a Christian life is to go through the world turning its water into wine.

Put quite simply, the true Christian learns to make the best of everything and everybody. Every wise man, whether he calls himself a Christian or not, discerns that there is no other way of making life worth living. He will set himself strenuously to make the best of things as he finds them. Only he is apt to be haunted at times with the thought that perhaps this brave endeavour is after all an illusion. He will not cherish it less

ardently, or follow it less perseveringly; but the secret fear will rob it of much of its zest and joy. The Christian knows it is truth, not illusion. He does not try to make the best of things—to wrest good out of evil, joy out of sorrow, life out of death—because it is after all the wisest thing to do; but because it is the truest thing to do. He has the Example of the true life before him—the witness of the Spirit of truth within him. He manifests, not the success of a helpful illusion, but the glory of the Incarnate Christ, when he thus resolutely turns the water into wine. Even if the water be salt—salt with the tears of sorrow or the bitterness of suffering—the spirit of Christ within him will convert it into the wine of closer fellowship with the Cross. If the water be clear and sparkling—the beauty of an autumn day, the invigoration of stimulating work, the companionship of children, the possession of human love—he will convert it into a deeper and more satisfying draught of wine, for he will taste in this the rich wine of the love of God.

IV. THE BEST AT THE LAST

"Every man setteth on first the good wine; and when men have drunk freely, then that which is worse; thou hast kept the good wine until now." So said the ruler of the feast at Cana to the bridegroom. It was but the jest of an evening; yet, though he little knew it, he was speaking a parable of life. For the words point the contrast between the way of worldly and of God-ward living. First the good wine, then, when men have drunk freely, the worse—that is the way in which the world entertains its friends. They have good wine set before them at the start. They have the joys of childhood—easy conscience, the endless variety of outward things, the surprises of an infinite curiosity, a sunlight where there is no shadow of self. They have the pleasures of youth—when hope is young, and health strong, and all the faculties of sense keen and alert. And they drink freely, for life tastes sweet in these early

irresponsible days. At all costs, they will "see life," they will "have a good time." But the good wine soon fails. It draws its flavour from outward things, and only a fresh taste can appreciate it. The taste palls from much indulgence, and outward things lose their power to please. They are not what they were in the brave young days. Cares, customs, inevitable responsibilities, awkward consequences, gradually limit their range. Sensations cease to stimulate—or stimulate without being able to satisfy. Then worse wine must suffice. Sometimes it is but the bitter dregs that remain—to be drunk with remorse and a kindred bitterness of spirit. Or else the same sort of wine is set on—the wine that money buys and the senses like—but it is meagre and faint in its taste: the flavour has gone out of it. Finally, there is nothing which the world can set before its friends but water—cold, comfortless. The mind works slowly, the senses are dull, the body is feeble, and there are no fresh resources in the spirit. The past is irrevocably

gone, and the wine that gladdened it; the present has no power to please, and the future is a hollow blank, with the spectre of death haunting it. The world's feast ends pitifully, and Death enters to put out the lights and carry the guests into the outer darkness.

It is far otherwise with the friends of God. For them He keeps the best wine for the last. They too begin with good wine—clear and sparkling in the days of childhood, rich and full in the days of youth. They take the gifts of life gladly, and make good use of them. But their wine is flavoured, not by outward things, but by the inward spirit. They know the great secret which God reveals to *His* guests, that the only source of happiness is within; not in things, but in the spirit which controls them. It is the quality, the disposition of the spirit, of the man's own self, that gives its flavour to outward circumstances. These might seem to the world's guest to have nothing but the taste of water—circumstances hard, uncongenial, marked by suffering or sacrifice. But God's guest

finds that the water becomes wine—wine richer and better than that which was set before him when things went well in early days of hope and strength. He falls back upon the inward resources of his spirit, and finds that they do not fail. Sorrow gives him the power of sympathy; difficulty increases the zest of effort; doubt deepens the longing for truth; disappointment turns his thoughts from the transitory to the eternal; sacrifice sets him on the lines of the true life which Jesus lived. All these strengthen the spirit by leading it to find its only stay in God. The water becomes the best wine, filling the soul with chastened strength and tranquil peace. Surely it is—certainly it ought to be—true of God's friends that they grow better as they grow older; their life becomes simpler, sweeter, stronger as the years pass. Contrast St. Peter in the early days, impulsive and unstable, with the strong sober strengthening St. Peter revealed to us in his Epistle. Think of the deep and tranquil possession of the truth which sustained

St. John as the old man looked out on the unequal struggle of the Church with the forces of the world. See how St. Paul, from the days of the Epistle to the Thessalonians to the days of the Epistle to the Colossians advances in grasp of the length, height, depth and breadth of the love and wisdom of God. See how some friend of God in your own experience becomes, as the years bow his head, more contented, more charitable, more happy in life and more resigned to death, more thankful for the past, more sure of the future; waiting for the end of life, with something of the glad expectancy with which the child looks out on its beginning. "Thou hast kept the good wine until now"—that is surely their testimony. It will be their voice of praise when "they drink it new in their Father's kingdom," at that ineffable feast where God Himself is to His saints full and everlasting joy.

THE DRAUGHT OF FISHES

St. Luke v. 1

THE DRAUGHT OF FISHES

St. Luke v. 1

I. THE FISHERMEN OF GALILEE

All night long the fishermen had been dragging their nets across the cold, dark lake, sick at heart and weary. How well I remember a night in the Sound of Kilbrannan—the cold sheen of the water reflecting the still grey of the dawn, the dreary plash of the oars, the weary dragging of the empty nets, the sullen faces of the fishermen! It was the very picture of dull and fruitless toil. So the fisherfolk of Galilee had toiled all night and taken nothing. In the morning they had beached their boats on the shore, they began to wash their nets of the weeds which were

the only fruit of their labours, and to mend the rents which the rocks had made. But ere long a new excitement banished the memories of the night. The village was in commotion. The street was crowded, and the crowd pressed down to the very edge of the lake. Before them—gradually thrust forward by their eagerness—was a young Rabbi, speaking to them. The fishermen knew Him. It was Jesus, the new Prophet from Nazareth. Perhaps they had known Him as the village carpenter. Certainly, not long ago, some of them had met Him on the distant banks of Jordan, and the great preacher had spoken wonderful words about Him. They had met Him again in Galilee. He had cast a strange spell over them, bade them follow Him, and they had obeyed. They had seen wondrous cures wrought by His hand; heard words from His lips which set new thoughts and hopes stirring within them. And now He asked leave to sit in Simon's boat, and speak to the people from it. Very soon would all thoughts of the long

night vanish—here, in the very boat in which they had toiled, were they listening to words which it was like the breath of spring to hear. Still, as the evening shadows began to fall, they were listening—rapt in a new world of peace and rest. Then—what a rude awakening from the happy spell! "He said unto Simon, 'Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets.'" At once the toilings of the night, the weariness, the cold, the disappointment came back to them. To face it all once again—impossible! "Master," said the outspoken Simon, "we have toiled all night and taken nothing." Was there a look of rebuke, a gesture of command? We know not. Enough! it was His word. They were ready to begin again. "Nevertheless, at Thy word, I will let down the net." But obedience to His word made all the difference. It was the same sea, the same nets, the same boat; but now, at His word, they enclosed a great multitude of fishes, so that the nets were breaking.

Thus were they taught a life-lesson. It

was the lesson that simple, trustful obedience to the word of Jesus is the alchemy that transforms disappointment into hope, failure into success. In the power of that trustful obedience they were to have the courage of new beginnings, of fresh ventures. Once again a similar deed was to deepen the impress of that lesson. You remember that wonderful later scene at daybreak on the same shore. The disciples had suffered a crushing disappointment, had been the witnesses of the failure of all their hopes. They had seen the Master crucified. The force of their depression had perhaps made them doubtful even of the reality of His appearances among them. They had returned to Galilee—they had gone a-fishing again, gone back to the old life of weary toil. Once again they had toiled all night and taken nothing. How strange and sad must have been their memories and thoughts that dreary night. Then in the grey light of dawn they saw the Figure on the shore, heard in the still morning air the words: "Cast the net on the right side of

the ship and ye shall find." And John whispered to Simon, "It is the Lord." At His word they had returned to the toil of Galilee; and lo! He, dead and crucified, was with them still.

In the years to come, when these fishermen would often be weary with the labours of fishing for the souls of men in the ship of the Master's Church, chilled by disappointments, faint-hearted through many failures, they would hear ever and again the calm sounding of the Master's word: "Launch out into the deep, and let down the nets for a draught." So He taught them; so through them He teaches us the lesson of perseverance under disappointment, of the cheerful readiness to make new beginnings.

II. PERSEVERANCE IN THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

The miracle is a lesson for the inward life. The story of a year's inward life is a story—told by conscience to most of us—of manifold

disappointment. "I *did* try," so we say. "I set out with good hopes and earnest prayers last New Year's Day; but the old temptations have been just as strong. I have made no headway after all. It has been a long toiling—struggles and surrenders—and the sins are still there. I have been reading, thinking, praying, and yet can I really say that since this time last year I have 'grown in grace,' seen further into God's truth, know more of God's love? And here is a new year come. With the memory of all my failures, can I begin again with new hope? Can I dare to offer again vows so often broken, love so often denied? O Master, none can know so well as Thou—I have toiled all night and taken nothing." Yes! He knows it, and because He knows it we do well to be sorrowful and sick of heart. But He who knows the worst has but one word to say: "Launch out into the deep." Once again, heedless of the past, renew the struggle. Begin again. The spiritual life is just a series of new beginnings. The only

failure is to cease to try. Launch out into the deep. Only it must be definitely and consciously *at His word,* in simple obedience and trust. Was not one of the reasons of our failure that after all we were thinking more of ourselves than of Him? Behind and before last year's resolutions did there stand a real and honest surrender of the whole self to the divine will? Were the struggles of the year waged consciously in reliance upon the Holy Spirit of God? Have I been rather thinking of my own feelings of success, of happiness in my religion, and troubling myself because I could not be sure of them, than doing simply and faithfully what God gave me to do, and leaving the feelings to Him to give and to withhold? If so, then I have been letting down the net at my own word, not at His word. The root of failure has been a subtle want of faith. The spiritual life must be lived through and through in the simple faith of the everlasting Word of God. I must get rid of all doubt that He means to conquer evil in me, to glorify His

name and vindicate His purpose in creating me, by setting me—me, just as I am, just through the circumstances in which He has placed me—faultless before His throne; to reveal the whole wonder of His love to me, so that I must needs respond to it with all the energy of love of which my mind and heart and will are capable. If only I will never give up trying, but in spite of all my stumblings keep the hand of my faith firm-clasped in the hand of His loving will for me, and, trusting in that grasp, hold on undauntedly, then He will bring me through all that the distractions of the world, the passions of the flesh, or the doubts and insinuations of the devil can bring against me, and make of me the man He created me to be.

> Let me no more my comfort draw
> From my frail hold of Thee:
> In this alone rejoice with awe—
> Thy mighty grasp of me.

Measure, then, the failures of last year, and say in penitence, "Master, we have toiled all night and taken nothing." But

measure also the cheer and promise with which the Master meets us at the threshold of the new year. "Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a draught." And in the strength of that command, set as the motto for another year of faithful and strenuous inward effort the words which when spoken by the will of man are always vindicated by the power of God: "At Thy word I will let down the net."

III. PERSEVERANCE IN WELL-DOING

We have noted the lesson of the Miracle of the Draught of Fishes for the inward life of the spirit. But it has a lesson also for the outward life of service. Perhaps we can think of some one whom we have long sought to influence for good. It may be wife or husband, son or daughter, brother, sister, or friend. We have had great hopes; but, alas! they have been checked by manifold disappointment. "My boy"—so the mother

thinks—"God knows the love I have for him. I have prayed for him since he lay a baby at my breast—prayed that he might be one of God's own men. I tried to teach him the faith of Christ: he used to say his prayers with me. But he has grown up, and grown apart from me. I do not know his thoughts —I fear they wander far from his Lord. I am not sure about his life, his habits, his friends. I have tried to speak to him; but he resents my words. All my prayers and efforts and words seem useless. Can I begin them all again? 'Master, I have toiled all night and taken nothing.'" Or, "There is my friend. I like him: I would do anything for him. Who could help liking his kindness, his good-nature, his frankness? But in the deepest things of life we are moving on different roads. He goes his own way, and it is not God's. I have prayed, but no answer comes. I have spoken, and he will not listen. I have planned, and my plans have failed. Is it any use to go on trying? 'Master, I have toiled all night and

taken nothing.'" There must surely be something akin to this bitterness of spirit in the experience of each one of us. Certainly, if we have any faith or joy or hope rooted in Christ, we must have something of His own longing for the souls of others. But if He gives it, He will give it in His own way—the way in which He knew it in His human life—the way of manifold disappointment. Influence for the eternal good of an immortal soul is a thing too great and wonderful to be easily attained. And the travail for it is often long and sore; so that all we can say is, "Master, we have toiled all night and taken nothing." But—be sure of it—His answer is ever the same—"Launch out into the deep and let down your nets." Launch out again and again into the deep of God's mysterious and eternal purpose. It *is* deep; deeper than we can fathom, very inscrutable to us. But launch out into it, trusting to His word.

At His word—"At Thy word"! that is the secret. Has not much of our effort to

influence been after all self-centred? Have we steadily remembered at every stage of it that our love for that soul is only a faint image of God's love for it? That God's will is set on bringing it back to Himself, with an infinity of longing and resource in comparison with which our desires and plans are as nothing? What is my wish compared with God's will? If I have not that faith in God's will and word I cannot succeed. I fret and worry and grow impatient, and make mistakes and lose heart and miss opportunities. If I have that faith—strong and resolute—then it will give me something of God's own calmness and patience. I shall set my wish on His will; and so enable His will to work through me. This faith in the fellow-working of God will not slacken my efforts, but it will steady them and guide them, and redeem them from anxiety and impatience. It will bring into them the calm of an invincible trust. In my own inward life the union of effort and trust is realised in the word—"Work out your own salvation with fear and

trembling, *for* it is God that worketh in you." So in my influence over others, let me work for it with zeal and urgency, but let me ever remember that it is God who worketh with me. All the seeming failures and disappointments—the words resented, the plans miscarried, the opportunities lost—will test, they cannot shake, my faith. God's word at once pledges me to ceaseless perseverance and sustains me through it. Let me, then, with revived courage and hopeful patience launch out once more into the deep where I have so long toiled and taken nothing—once more let down the nets of my prayers and words and efforts." "Nevertheless, at Thy word I will let down the net."

THE MAN SICK OF THE PALSY

St. Mark ii. 1

THE MAN SICK OF THE PALSY

St. Mark ii. 1

I. THE FAITH OF FRIENDS

THE vividness of the narrative makes it easy for us to picture the scene—the sunlit street of Capernaum; the brightly-coloured crowd of peasants pressing in at the door; within, either in the large upper room, or in the cool courtyard, the Prophet standing and speaking His wonderful words to the company of Scribes and Pharisees who had come from the surrounding villages to test the new teaching; the crowd eager to hear their teachers taught, or to see some wonder wrought; the four men arriving late with their poor pitiful burden of the paralytic on his bed, bearing it

in the invincible determination of love and hope up the outer staircase to the roof, and hurriedly removing the tiles: the sudden appearance of the bed let down before the speaker, interrupting His words, challenging His compassion; His look, upturned to the friends, as they anxiously watch the issue of their boldness, downturned to the sick man on the pallet: then the tone of the Prophet's voice as the great words break the sudden silence, "Son, thy sins are forgiven."

Think first of the words—so simple, so pregnant—"Jesus, *seeing their faith.*" Faith was the condition for which Jesus waited before He could do any mighty work; here He found it in the sick man's friends. It seems plain, from the very structure of the sentences, that it was their faith rather than his which Jesus discerned, a faith tested by its resolute pressure through all difficulties. The faith of the friends availed for the sick man's healing.

It is not surprising that it should have been so. The linking of lives is one of the

common mysteries of the world. The forces that mould men's lives have often their springs in the lives of others. That quiet unconscious example—how different should we have been had we never seen it! That resolute will for our good, when our own was so wavering; that loving faith in our better selves, when our own was so faltering—who knows what their influence has done for us? Two persons meet—it would seem by accident—and two lives are transformed by love, and the history of one new life opens. Who that watches this mystery of influence can wonder that God can accept the faith of one man as the condition of the good of another? And faith, in its simplest exercise, is prayer. Who can wonder at the rewards which may be given to the prayers of the faithful?

The words are not surprising; but they are surely encouraging. They are a warrant for patient perseverance in faith and prayer. The spread of Christianity among all the nations seems beset with unsurmountable difficulties. They turn the surface faith of

the man of the world into frank scepticism about Christian Missions. In any argument based upon obvious facts he may seem to have the best of it. But faith—the faith of the Christian Church in the mere word of its Master—is to pass the closed doors and climb the thick walls with the importunate spirit of prayer, and to set the heathen world before Christ. If the faith be but resolute, and the prayer that expresses it be but constant, He will see it and it will find its reward.

Here is the work which has been set me to do—the district to visit, the class to teach, the parish to serve, the life to influence. It seems utterly beyond my power. It goes wrong; there is no response; there is a dreary succession of difficulties and disappointments. The doors of entry into the hearts of these people seem closed; the walls of prejudice, of ignorance, of callousness stand thick and grim before me. But, if I have not light, I can have faith; if I have not success, I can pray; I can bring my work to

Him who called me to it. It may be that the steadfastness of my unshaken faith, the persistence of my unknown prayers, will succeed where all my best-chosen words and best-devised plans have failed.

II. THE SECRET OF THE SICK MAN

"Son, thy sins are forgiven thee." The words must have been heard with surprise. They were certainly not expected. It was for acts and words of healing that the friends and the crowd were waiting. What had forgiveness of sins to do with the palsy? But there was one person among them all who would feel that the words were not irrelevant, the sick man himself. To him they were the answer to his secret need. As he lay there before the Prophet, with the Prophet's penetrating gaze upon him, the spell of the Prophet's goodness over him, his thought was not of the palsied limbs but of the wounded conscience. It may be that old sins were the

cause of his palsy; it may be that the smart of conscience in that holy presence was so acute that he could feel naught else. "Ah, what is all the healing in the world to me! It cannot touch my sin. Could this holy man but heal me of my sin, I could even bear the palsy." You may remember how, in Wagner's great drama, the unveiling of the Holy Grail made the wound of Amfortas quiver again with sharpest pain. So the sick man in the presence of the Holy One felt the yet unhealed wound of the soul, the aching of the sense of unforgiven sin. The Good Physician probed the secret: "Son, I read the secret story of thy life. I hear the inward cry of thy spirit. I accept the penitence of thy remorse. Thy sins are forgiven thee."

Well were it often for us if we thus brought our lives under the diagnosis of the Great Healer. Are they not, many of them, smitten with a moral palsy? Our knowledge of what they ought to be is clear. Our ideal for them is true, our desires are good. But there is somehow, somewhere, a paralysis

within them. The springs of spiritual movement are somehow stopped. The capacity for enthusiasm is blunted. The spiritual sight is clouded. There is no inward leaping of the soul for joy. All our wishes and efforts for ourselves, still more for others, seem doomed to a constant and depressing ineffectiveness. There is a want of liberty, vitality, brightness of the spirit. Yes; the spiritual life is sick of a palsy. We blame our circumstances, our surroundings, sometimes our God. "Why should it be so dull and morose, and feeble, and disappointing, this religion of mine?" Let us be frank with ourselves, and face the truth—the secret of the malady is sin.

There is some old sin, haunting ever the chambers of memory, restless, unappeased. There is some "root of bitterness springing up," and spreading its bane over all the energies of the soul. It may be in itself apparently small—a grudge, perhaps, which I will not forget; a resentment, which I will not conquer. It may be a crossness of temper,

an indulged irritability; a germ of jealousy; an uncontrolled looseness of speech; a habit of censorious judgment; a love of gossip; a reluctance to pierce softness of living with the sacrifice of discipline. It may be some doubtful trick of trade in which I acquiesce. It may be some uncleanness of imagination, alternately loathed and indulged. But whatever it may be, it is this which spreads the havoc; which brings a palsy to the spiritual life.

This is the root of the disease. There is but one remedy — forgiveness. But the moral conditions of forgiveness are severe. There must be *self-examination*—honest, rigorous, decisive. We must come face to face with what is wrong. If we do not know it, the presence of Christ will reveal it. Let us bring our lives, bit by bit, into contact with the character of Christ; let us look at ourselves, as it were, with His eyes, and we shall see our sin. There must be *contrition;* not a mere sense of general unsatisfactoriness, not a mere readiness to acknowledge the sin ·

but a strong revolt of the will against it. The whole man within us must look the sin in the face and say, "I will not have thee." We must view it as an insult to our manhood which we will tolerate no longer. It is these decisive aversions that we need—sin thrives on the postponements, the vacillations with which we humour it. And, once again, the aversion becomes decisive in proportion as we keep Christ resolutely before us as the Ideal of our manhood, and the Master of our life. There must be *confession*—the deliberate, definite laying of the sins before God. But the confession, as it were, reaches God only when it is made honest by a "full purpose of *amendment*"—resolution made quickly and firmly, as by a man who counts the cost, and having resolved would be ashamed to surrender. When the sin is thus dealt with, it is forgiven. There is no other way of healing. He has no science of the human soul who bids us recover buoyancy of spirit by ceasing to think of sin. Liberty, joy, power—these come just in proportion to the

thoroughness of penitence. It is not forgetfulness, but only forgiveness, that can set the soul free from the paralysis of sin.

III. SOCIAL PALSY

The man sick of a palsy may be taken as typical—not only of many individuals, but of society as a whole. There is a widespread moral impotence, whose root-cause is the want of any serious sense of sin and the failure to deal with it honestly. It is a palsy of the conscience.

It is of little use to compare one age with another; in each generation "sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." Certainly the moral aspect of our own times, in our own country—to take no wider view—must cause serious misgivings. Is there not in what are called the upper ranks of society an increasing frivolousness, an elaboration of amusement, an adulation of money for the pleasures it can buy an indifference to moral distinctions in

men and books and talk, sometimes merely thoughtless, but often avouched and deliberate? Moral worth is placed among the things that are tedious and uninteresting—the qualities on which social store is set are excitement, novelty, brilliance, audacity. There is but one unpardonable sin—dulness. If vice can sparkle, it is more valued than virtue. This is the vanity, the emptiness, of the fool who says in his heart, if not by his mouth, "There is no God."

Is there not in what are called the lower ranks of society the same spirit in a cruder, coarser form—a moral "impudence," to use a forcible name which has been given to it? Impudence, absence of that sense of shame for things evil, that *pudor*, or reverent respect for things good, which belong to men who have the fear of God before their eyes. Consider the obtrusive independence of boys and girls in the treatment of their parents, the refusal to serve, the decrease of the unquestioning instinct of obedience, the resentment of any claim to deference. Consider the

literature, such as, for example, you will find in any railway carriage, a literature which in less than ten years has emerged in shameless effrontery. There are many signs of the breakdown of clear moral distinctions. The commands "Thou shalt," and "Thou shalt not," are not so much questioned as ignored. The writ of God has ceased to run.

Yet it is not a case of death. There are still many of the signs of life—among the rich, a capacity of response to higher ideals, spasms of generous impulse, a yearning still for better things: among the poor, cheerfulness, good humour, ready and genial kindness. It is not death, but palsy. The good elements are there, but feeble, inconstant, lacking in the strength of conviction. Wish is there, but it is not hardened into duty. "I would like" has not become "I ought." The defect is poverty of conscience, lack of the sense of sin. The revival of these is the only remedy.

Men must be "convinced of sin." Repentance is the only way of recovery.

But how is it to be aroused? Many of the older methods avail no longer. Threats have lost their terror. It is vain now to draw pictures of the doom of the sinner—such warnings were once too common; they have lost their power. It is futile merely to denounce. The influence of preaching is declining: it requires for its effectiveness an atmosphere of accepted beliefs which no longer exists. The phrases of religion, however earnestly repeated, have become too familiar: and familiarity has bred contempt. The face of the man in the street as he listens to the appeals of a street preacher is a sign of the times. The sense of sin, the revival of conscience, can only come through the attractive, constraining power of a vision of goodness. The man sick of the palsy must be brought into the presence of the Christ. But, once again, "Jesus" has become a phrase: it must be translated into a reality by the Christian. The appeal which is to touch the heart and enlist the will must be the appeal of Christlike characters. The Christian

Church must cease to be a mere organisation of sermons and forms of worship and become a society of Christlike men. Christ must live in His members. Other men, seeing Him thus, will own His claim; they will feel themselves sinners in His presence: they will turn from their evil to His goodness. The primary need, at home and abroad, is not only the preaching but also the witness of Christ. The heedless and the heathen will become Christians only when Christians have become Christlike.

IV. FORGIVENESS

The answer of our Lord to the remonstrances of the Scribes, recorded with so singular exactness by all three Evangelists, has doubtless a meaning deeper than that which lies upon the surface. The challenge of their reasonings was plain and crude, "Any impostor who has sufficient audacity may claim the power of forgiveness, for it cannot be tested. It is another thing

immediately to bid a helpless paralytic to rise, take up his bed and walk. This new teacher shirks a test in which failure would be obvious to all." The reply of Jesus was simple. It met their point, it accepted their test. It proved that His words of forgiveness were not an impotent boast: they had a divine power behind them, which He manifested in the sight of all by bidding the man arise and go upon his way. Yet His words were something deeper than a mere answer to a passing challenge. They were a revelation of the law of divine forgiveness.

Forgiveness is no mere letting off: it is no mere formal reckoning the sin as if it had not been committed. The word of God effects what it declares: it has the power of God behind it. It does not merely account us right with God: it sets us right. It is not negative but positive: not a judge's sentence of "Not Guilty," but a father's welcome to restored sonship. It is not a legal but a spiritual act. And the restoration is a restoration to life. There is a deep symbolic

meaning in the man who had been forgiven rising from his bed in the fulness of restored energy and going forth before them all. The life-giving power had gone out from the Divine Healer and entered the sinner who was sick. The freedom of his arising and going upon his way was, as it were, the outward and visible sign of the inward grace of forgiveness which had been bestowed upon him. This is ever the nature and effect of divine forgiveness. Our sins check, thwart, destroy the fulness of the spiritual life. They choke the channels through which, from Christ the Source, the Spirit, the Life-giver, fills us with the currents of the true life. When by repentance, the obstacles are removed, once again the stream of life flows in upon us from its Lord. The union between us and Him is restored, and we live again.

This truth—that forgiveness is not a formal but a vital act—brings with it alike warning and encouragement. It brings a warning. There is no mechanical connection between confession and forgiveness. It is a

spiritual, vital connection. My heart and will must be in my penitence before the Divine Power can be in the word of forgiveness. Nor is mere remorse for the past sufficient, however sincere; feeling the bitterness of the sin will not remove it, only the resolute determination to have done with it. It is when we thus reckon up the cost of penitence that we realise our inability to pay it. My weakened conscience can never adequately judge my sin—know its real guilt. My palsied will can never be trusted to fulfil its own intention of turning from the sin finally to God. Yet just here is the encouragement. I cannot pay the cost of penitence; but Christ has paid it for me. He, the true Man, has realised to its full depth the guilt of sin. He has offered His will as a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice to the Father. If therefore my acknowledgment of my sin, however unworthy, is at least honest, and the offer of my will's allegiance, however imperfect, is at least sincere, this avails to restore my union with Christ. And, for me thus united to

Him, His Atonement avails. Made one with Him, I am in Him made one again with God. His acknowledgment of the sinfulness of sin, His sacrifice of a righteous will, become mine. In Him I am justified: for His sake I am forgiven.

Thus forgiveness is not withheld until some final day of doom. "The Son of Man on earth," here in the very course of our daily life, "hath power to forgive sins." It must be so. For so soon as my repentance is real, the sin that stands between me and Christ is removed, the barrier that prevents His life passing into mine is broken down, and at once His Spirit which is within me, close to me as my very self, reunites me to Him, restores my living fellowship with Him. There is no pause between the penitence and the forgiveness. Into the soul, opened by penitence, there comes the waiting Spirit of Christ, and that reunion of life is forgiveness. The word "Thy sins are forgiven thee," carries with it the command "Arise." They are but parts of the one restoration to life.

THE WOMAN WITH THE ISSUE OF BLOOD

St. Mark v. 24

THE WOMAN WITH THE ISSUE OF BLOOD

St. Mark v. 24

I. THE TOUCH OF FAITH

In a crowd the individual is lost, merged for the moment in the spirit of the body, in the common wave of excitement, anger, or pleasure which passes through it. So must it have been with this crowd in Galilee. We can see it passing along the white road, pressing and thronging under the stress of a common excitement. They were intent upon the chance of seeing the Prophet of Nazareth working a wonder. To one only —to the Prophet Himself—the mass was as nothing, the individual souls that composed

it everything. Can we not reverently imagine His thoughts as men, women, and children jostled confusedly against and around Him? For each one of them there was the infinite longing of His love, the infinite desire of His compassion, the infinite willingness of His help. His person was as it were stored with resources of love and power, upon which each one of them if he cared could draw for his need. They were ready for him if only he would put forth the plea of faith to claim them. But they could not be bestowed, unless of his own free will and in the felt urgency of his own need he asked for them. There must be the claim of faith. Jesus would work no miracle to compel their faith, but only to reward it. Though, therefore, the crowd thronged Him and pressed against Him, He felt in none of them that touch of faith which alone could draw forth the virtue, the energy of love and power that was in Him. It is an experience which many of His disciples in their degree have shared. They have moved among the

crowds of men, eager to give His message, knowing and trying to communicate its power; and everywhere it is met and repelled by the blankness of sheer indifference. In the midst of the many, they are alone. Such was the solitariness of Jesus as He moved along with this Galilean crowd.

At last, and suddenly, He felt that touch of faith. At last He knew that among the crowd one soul had put forth the hand of its own secret need, and drawn from Him the strength waiting for the claim. "And straightway Jesus perceiving in Himself that the power proceeding from Him had gone forth, turned Him about in the crowd and said, 'Who touched my garments?'"

Into the company there had glided a poor lonely, afflicted woman. For twelve years her life had been given over to the weary tragedy of an incurable disease. All her money had gone in the fruitless search of cure: doubtless, as in so many similar lives, with the money had gone her friends. The disease, moreover, had made her ceremonially

unclean; she was compelled by law to keep apart from men. It is a picture of sordid, miserable, hopeless loneliness. Yet even to her, in that sad withdrawn life, the tidings of the Prophet of Nazareth had come. Had He not wrought wondrous cures? He was the friend of the sinful and unclean; He would not despise her. She would go to Him even in the crowd. Think of the courage needed for that venture—she unclean, to enter a crowd, to run the risk of exposure, shame, punishment! But her faith was strong with the urgency of her need. She dared not speak to Him—that would call the attention of the multitude to an unclean person in their midst. But she said to herself, "If I touch but His garments I shall be made whole." She crept silently through the crowd behind Him, and touched the fringe of His cloak. And at once the thrill of health—of freedom from her weary prison—passed through her. "She felt in her body that she was healed of her plague." It was the touch of faith; and it liberated for her

the resources of divine compassion and power. It was a faith ignorant, perhaps, and superstitious; but it was real, and because it was real it was sufficient. Jesus must speak to her; must make that very picture of lonely misery an evidence to all of the love and pity of God. "He looked round about to see her that had done this thing." Surely a sore trial. How she must have shrunk from the gaze, half curious, half contemptuous, of the crowd. "Fearing and trembling she came and fell down before Him." But the reward was worth the shame. He called her by a name of special tenderness—her, the diseased outcast—"Daughter." "Daughter, thy faith hath saved thee—healed thy disease, given thee a new hope in life, a new trust in God; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague."

It is surely a tale full of the deepest lessons. If it were only a human tale, it would be memorable—a fragment of the infinite pathos of humanity coming down to us from that old Eastern world, and claiming

still the response of the sympathy which binds all men in all ages with one another. But how much more memorable, if we believe that the kind Prophet was none other than the Creator of heaven and earth made manifest in human form! Then it becomes no mere tale, but a revelation of the ways of God with men. The crowd becomes the world heedless of God, knowing nothing of the mysterious powers in its midst, through which the Spirit of God answers to the need of man. The woman becomes the symbol of the pathos of human life—the burden of loneliness, of anxiety, of disease, of weariness, of effort baffled, of hope deferred, which weighs down the spirit of man. The Prophet becomes the assurance of an infinite pity adequate in its response to the infinite pathos, of an infinite power bending to the infinite need, of an infinite love working out its glory, through the very sadness of things. The tale is the witness, that behind all the darkness which sometimes veils it, "the heart of the Eternal is most wonderfully kind."

II. THE DIVINE KNOWLEDGE OF HUMAN NEED

Let us try to learn the first and simplest lesson of the tale. It is the lesson of the individual knowledge and care of God. Jesus was God—the sure revelation of the mind and thought of the great Spirit of the universe: and God felt the woman's touch. Jesus giving out the fulness of His pity and power to this poor outcast, Jesus calling her "Daughter," is revealing God's thought for every soul that He has made.

We are apt to think that in the great throng of the world's multitudes—multitudes which none can number of suns and stars and men and living things—our solitary individual life, with its own poor burden of care and wish and hope, must be forgotten. We know that our nearest friends have little heed of it, and we shrink from bringing it to their notice. How then can we venture to think that there is knowledge of it in the

Most High? We can think of His great laws governing the course of things; but, in their operation we note the apparently vast waste and sacrifice of the units. "So careful of the type" He "seems, so careless of the single life." Great thoughts, great acts, great discoveries, great ideals—these doubtless are known to Him, for they have something of His own greatness. But what place can there be in an infinite and eternal mind for the cares—petty enough even to my friends, though heavy enough for me—the secret anxieties, hopes, disappointments, struggles, which ruffle the waters of my little stream of life, before it is calmed in the great depths of the Sea of Death? "I shall be hidden from the Lord: and who shall remember me from on high? I shall not be known among so many people; for what is my soul in a boundless creation?" *

So we think in moments when the solitariness of our inner life presses upon us. But just because the knowledge of God is infinite,

* Ecclus. xvi. 17.

there can be nothing that is unknown to it. It cannot fail to be as real and definite and full about my individual life and its even unspoken thoughts, desires, cares, as it is about the courses of the sun and stars, and the destiny of the human race; otherwise it would not be infinite. You remember how Tennyson, watching the "flower in the crannied wall," says that, if he could only understand it through and through, he would "know what God and man is." It is only when we think of the divine mind as finite like our own—limited by space and time—that we can feel the force of that disquieting doubt which checks prayer, and shuts us up to the sense of our own solitariness.

And yet there would be little solace in the mere thought of divine omniscience. God might be no more than a passive intellect to which everything was at once absolutely known and absolutely indifferent. But Jesus —accepted as God—reveals that with and in His knowledge is eternally His love. His love is as wide in its range and yet as

individual in its application as His knowledge. An infinitude of love and care and power is ever available for me as for the meanest of His creatures. There is nothing in the universe that is within the knowledge of God which is not equally within His love—except sin. That secret prayer of mine, that wish known only to myself, that thought which could not be expressed in words, that disappointment of which none shall ever know, that hope which I almost fear to cherish—all the story of my solitary inward life is within the love and the knowledge of God. And it is as intensely real to Him as it is to me. He is concerned in it: He has a purpose for it. He will guide it, as He who knows best sees best.

III. THE WORK OF FAITH

There is then available for me, for the secret needs of my solitary life, the infinite knowledge and compassion of God. But before these can reach me something must go forth from me to claim them. The relation-

ship between divine resource and human need is never mechanical: it is personal. God deals with us and we must deal with Him as person with person. My personality must come into direct conscious contact with His. How, then, is my personality to reach His—my need to secure for me the waiting grace of God?

The story we are considering gives us the answer. It is the touch of faith. The virtue did not go forth from the great Healer until it had been summoned by the hand that touched Him. The hand which had in it the appealing energy of faith reached and drew forth the answering energy of grace. The human need was there: the divine resource was there; but they were apart. It was the touch of faith, of personal claim, that brought them together. So must it be with us. Faith it is which, abandoning altogether the proved futility of trust in self, or in any effort self can make, and stretching forth the plea of a felt need to the divine compassion, brings my personality into touch with God and liberates His grace upon me.

It may be a faith at first childish, imperfect, ignorant of all that it involves; so was the faith of the woman, in the story of the miracle. It may be a faith conscious all the while of the difficulties which remain, and which, if dwelt upon by the mind, would make against it. It may be but the faith "as of a child that cries." But if it is *real*, it is enough. If it is the casting of one's whole self in the urgency of one's need upon God, then it brings us to Him.

> Then was I as a child that cries
> But, crying, knows his father near;
> And what I am beheld again
> What is, and no man understands;
> And out of darkness came the hands
> That reach thro' nature, moulding men.

Such faith can bring our personality into touch with God long before it is full, clear, conscious of all it means. If it be the appeal of a really felt need of God made in trust that the divine ear will hear it, then it will avail to win whatever answer the perfect knowledge and love of God see best. Moreover, faith need not wait until the moral life is in

full accord with it. We do not believe because we *are* perfect: we believe in order that we may become perfect. "Abraham believed in God; and it was accounted to him for righteousness." For God sees in this faith the promise and potency of all that it can make us. He takes us not for what we are, but for what, with faith continued, we can become. The first act of faith unites us to God, and the life of faith keeps us united to Him. His word is, "Thy faith hath saved thee—hath put thee in that conscious relation with God, by means of which the grace that will keep thee in a true life can enter thee: go in peace—go forward in the sure and restful sense that you are in the right way."

Yet such faith, even in its simplest form, implies some assurance that the Supreme Power on which it casts itself is a Person, who knows and cares and pities. Where is the warrant for such an assurance? If it be an instinct of the soul, is there any *fact* on which one can rely as a proof of its rightness? Encompassed as we are with mysteries

which we cannot fathom, beset with difficulties which we cannot solve, knowing instinctively that there is a God if only we could find Him; that there is a purpose in life if only we could grasp it; realising that without this supreme discovery our life must be uncertain, fragmentary, sick with impotence, we listen to all the voices of the world, to hear perchance some sure word on which we can trust; we scan the history of the world to find perchance some sure fact on which we can lean. Then the tale of Jesus of Nazareth confronts us—the tale of the words He said and of the life He lived. It meets our need with a mingled depth and simplicity beyond our imagining. We are sure that it is not human need that has conceived the tale, but rather the tale that has vindicated and completely met the human need. We believe; we take it to be true; true that in Jesus God revealed what He is, what we are meant to be, what He wills to make us. Here is the sure word to trust, the sure fact to lean upon. It is not a feeling; it is a word historically spoken, a fact which historically happened. We trust

and accept it. This is the ultimate warrant of faith—of confidence in the character of God.

IV. THE VENTURES OF FAITH

There is another element in faith which must not be forgotten if it is to "save" us. A thing so deep-reaching as faith—involving as it does the mystery of personality, human and divine—cannot be compressed into a single definition. But it would be a description adequate enough to say that Faith is accepting God's revelation *and* living as if it were true. Both sides must be remembered. It is no mere blank acceptance: it is an acceptance which at once proves and sustains its reality by the acts a man does on the strength of it. Faith, however simple, is not proved to be real until it ventures into act. The woman's faith was realised in the act of touching: that was the test and evidence of its reality. So must it be with ours. It is not enough merely to believe that God is, that He is as Jesus has revealed Him. It is

not even enough to welcome that revelation as a supreme answer to our needs: we must in some way act upon that faith. We must stake something upon it, make ventures on the strength of it. "Faith without works," said St. James, "is dead." He was thinking indeed of mere dull orthodoxy of creed; but his words are true of faith itself. The test of life in the new-born child is motion; and if faith does not at once and continuously move out into action, it is proved to be stillborn. The faith which justifies, said St. Paul, is the faith that "energises itself in love." And therefore we can have no such thing as an "assurance" of faith, unless it prompts us to act. And God may well wait for the act—as Jesus waited for the woman's touch—before He gives to faith its full reward. Part of the plea of our faith must be its evidence in act. The acts may be, like the faith, at first simple and imperfect. But if they are done loyally and thoroughly, they prove the faith's reality.

One of our most brilliant men of science

told us that long after he had come to believe in God, he could not bring himself to the act of prayer—an act which seemed to be so counter to all the associations of his mind. But until there had come into his faith the courage of that act it must have remained uncertain of itself, shorn of its reward. If therefore I have come to accept God's revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ, I must throw myself into acts corresponding to it—acts which apart from it I either would not do at all or would do with another motive. I must pray, and pray with a directness, a simplicity, a confidence answering to my faith in the Fatherhood of God as revealed in Jesus. I shall surely school myself to welcome the sacramental acts which He Himself instituted as the pledged and appointed means by which He conveys to me His Presence and the life which His Presence gives. I must set to work to train myself by repeated acts of recollection and of effort in those qualities of the soul upon which He has set the special stamp of His will—

not only, *e.g.*, honesty, thoroughness, kindness, but also humility in thought and speech. I must be able to point to some definite acts of self-denial which would not have occurred to me unless I had believed in the Cross as the law of life. It is in such ways as these that my *will*—the abiding centre of my personality—puts itself into my faith: and when once God knows that my will is His, He knows that He can fulfil His will in me. He sees therefore that I am fit to receive His grace. He can give His Holy Spirit to me, to work with me and in me. If, then, a man is trusting not to any emotion of his own, but to his faith in God revealed in Christ, if he is accepting God's grace under the conditions on which God has revealed His will to bestow it, if he is putting his will-power into the service of God, and of his fellow-men for God's sake—then the Spirit of God is pledged to him; and he may humbly and surely know that he is in the way of salvation. He is learning the power of the faith that saves.

HEALING ON THE SABBATH-DAY

St. Matt. xii. 9; St. Mark iii. 1; St. Luke vi. 6

HEALING ON THE SABBATH-DAY

St. Matt. xii. 9; St. Mark iii. 1; St. Luke vi. 6

I. PHARISAISM

A MAN'S worst enemies are those of his own household. The worst enemies of religion are the characteristic faults of the religious man. They are traitors within the gate, poison in the very spring. Our Lord, coming to fulfil an imperfect religion, and to inaugurate the true religion, must needs deal with a false spirit which had already corrupted the one and would continually corrupt the other. Of that spirit the Pharisees were the conspicuous representatives. It was with them, not with the world or the sinner, that the main combat of His earthly life was waged.

From the very outset He was confronted by their instinctive enmity. The battle-ground on which the rival spirits of false and true religion were tested by the clearest and simplest issue was the observance of the Sabbath. Very early in the struggle the Pharisees entrenched themselves upon this position: and Jesus at once challenged and attacked them. In the synagogue on a certain Sabbath there happened to be a man with a withered hand. Here was His opportunity. "The Pharisees watched Him whether He would heal on the Sabbath-day, that they might find how to accuse Him." He accepted the challenge. "He knew their thoughts: and He said to the man that had his hand withered, Rise up and stand forth in the midst. And He looked round about upon them all and said unto him, Stretch forth thy hand: and he did so: and his hand was restored. But they were filled with madness."

"They watched Him, that they might find how to accuse him." That was the fundamentally false spirit of religion in its simplest

form—the uncharitableness of spiritual pride. The Sabbath was for these Jews a divine institution: its strict observance was a divine command; its aim was one of deepest importance—that an absolute suspense of the law of labour should forcibly recall men's minds to the supremacy of God. The Pharisees were therefore right to observe it, and to observe it strictly. It was not in this that they went wrong, but in making the right observance a matter of spiritual pride. Righteousness became self-righteousness, and thus contradicted itself. When self is admitted into the spirit, he plays the traitor and hands it over to his ally, the devil. Thus, to increase the satisfaction of self-righteousness, the strictness of Sabbath-keeping was increased by a mass of pedantic and scrupulous rules, until the commandment of God was overladen with the traditions of men. Each new rule made and kept was a new feather in the plume of spiritual pride.

Two fatal consequences inevitably followed. First, the true spiritual purpose of the

commandment was lost sight of: the observance of the Sabbath became a reminder, not of God's supremacy, but of man's righteousness. Meant to be the minister of humility, it became the minister of pride. Hence, secondly, each of its pedantic rules was made a touchstone of orthodoxy—a standpoint of censorious judgment. All the divine institutions of the law suffered a like perversion at the hands of the Pharisees. The "hedge of the law" which was meant to keep men true to God became an enclosure from which God and fellow-man were alike shut out—God by self-righteousness and man by uncharitableness. The elect who kept within became hardened by their self-conceit—closed to all movements of the Spirit of God—incapable of that love of God and love of man which were the whole object of the law. No wonder that Jesus looked round upon this knot of Pharisees with anger, and was "grieved at the hardening of their heart."

It cannot be too often repeated that Pharisaism is still the bane of religion. It is

the special sin of religious people; and it is always, as it was then, the sins of religious men that crucify the Christ. If its Head were to-day to visit His Church, His combat would still be with its enthusiastic adherents. He would still attract the publicans and sinners and trouble the Pharisees. Whenever a doctrine, even if it be true, or a practice, even if it be divinely commanded, is made a ground of self-righteousness and of uncharitableness, the sin of the Pharisee is upon it; and falsehood is planted in the very heart of truth. Thus, the doctrine that we are saved by the merits of Christ is true; but let a man by "accepting" it flatter his soul, "Behold, I am saved!" let him question the possibility of salvation in every brother-man who does not profess his own shibboleth of "acceptance," and he is a Pharisee. The Church is a divine institution; membership in His Body is His condition of grace; but let the privilege become a boast, and inevitably traditions of men will be multiplied to frustrate the commandment of God and to

furnish stones for building the pedestal of pride; and, once again, Pharisees will turn the truth into a lie. It is not the holding of the truth that is wrong, but the false spirit in which it is held. Let us remember the present power of religious parties, the jealous zeal of sects; let us behold them as they are, watching any one who appears to differ from them, "that they may accuse him"; and we shall realise the truth that Pharisaism is as rife in the Church of Christ as it was in the nation of the Jews.

II. THE CURE OF PHARISAISM

Jesus was not content merely to denounce the disease of Pharisaism: He provided a cure for it. It was the deliberate return to the first principles of religion. To these He made His appeal when He was confronted by the Pharisees on that Sabbath-day of which we are thinking. "He saith unto them, Is it lawful on the Sabbath-day to do good or to

do harm—to save a life or to kill?" He did not question the divine obligation of the Sabbath; but He tried to recall men's minds from the abuse of it to its primary purpose which they had forgotten. That purpose may be thus described:—Life was the highest attainment of creation, and goodness is the highest form of life. When God, after creating man, rested on the seventh day and reviewed His creation and pronounced it "very good," He had reached the climax of His creative purpose—a life made in the image of Him whose highest attribute is perfect goodness. To do good, therefore, and to save life is to reach the height on which God rested, and which the Day of His Rest was to commemorate. It was the true spirit of Sabbath-keeping. This true spirit the letter of the rabbinical rules had killed. It was in the same way that the Pharisees had lost and Jesus restored the true meaning of the whole Law.

The Pharisees were right in their devotion to the Law, right in referring it to God

Jesus declared that He came not to destroy but to fulfil the Law. And one of His chief modes of fulfilling it was to reassert its summary purpose—the love of God, and of man for God's sake. This, he said, was the whole of the Law and the Prophets. He came preaching the Gospel: and the Gospel was summed up in the two great twin truths—the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man. The test of the fulfilment of the Law must be the manner in which it led to the Gospel. So in this matter of the Sabbath—if men only remembered that their Creator was a Father and that their fellow-creature was a brother, they *could* not think that to heal the withered hand was to break the Sabbath—the memorial of what creation meant.

This same fundamental Gospel is to remain as the constant corrective of all misuse of the new laws of the kingdom of God. There are laws divinely given — laws of truth and laws of conduct; there are institutions divinely appointed. But the purpose of

all is just to make the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man clearer in thought and stronger in practice. Our use of them is to be continually tested by its correspondence with that primary purpose. The doctrine of the Incarnation of which the Creeds are the expression is a divine truth; but its value is the assurance it gives, not that he who repeats it is safe in his orthodoxy, but that God is a Father and Man His Son. The Church is a divine institution, and its sacraments are divinely appointed; but it too was instituted just that men might realise their brotherhood in the life of God's family. Thus all our orthodoxy and all our Church-life is to submit to this final appeal. "Do they, as I use them, make the truth real to me that God is my Father and Man is my brother?" If we find that they narrow the largeness of the love of God or issue in uncharitable judgments of men, we may be sure that a wrong spirit has been brought into them.

The Church, then, if it is to be kept free

from the taint of Pharisaism, must continually re-examine its life and thought in the light of the primary Gospel. While it is reciting its creed, or celebrating its solemn mysteries, or exercising its appointed discipline, it must ever hear a voice behind it saying: "God is the Father, Man everywhere the brother." For that voice is the voice of Him who was Son of God and Son of Man.

III. THE LORDSHIP OF THE SON OF MAN

What we have called the primary Gospel is to be the test of our doctrines, our worship, and our life. But it is essential to remember that the Gospel is something more than a record of Christ's teaching—it is the witness of His ever-living Spirit. Thus it is the Spirit of Jesus that is to keep us true, both to the doctrines, the institutions, the commands which are of God, and to the central purpose which they were meant to serve. This was the meaning of that saying of His

which had provoked the Pharisees to watch His treatment of the Sabbath-day. "The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath." Even of the Sabbath—there is no command, however certainly of divine sanction, over which the Spirit of the Son of God and Brother of Man is not Lord. That Spirit is its final authority: conformity to that Spirit is its final test.

This is the truth still, as to the whole fabric of the Christian religion. Christianity is ultimately based, not on any system, or book, or rules, or institutions, but on a Person. The Person of Jesus is Lord even of the Church—its creeds, its Scriptures, its discipline, its means of grace. The value of all these is just the degree in which they keep men true to the Spirit of Jesus—of the Jesus who is revealed to us in the Gospels. It seems the veriest commonplace; but the history of the Church is a story of the long neglect of it. How little there was of the Spirit of Jesus in the outward pomp and policy of the mediæval Church! How little

in the bitter and barren word-battles which stain the memory of the Reformation! Can we imagine the Jesus of the Gospels contending on one side or the other among Calvinists and Arminians, Supralapsarians, Anabaptists, or any of these baleful sects? Even when in England, at the end of the eighteenth century, the revival of evangelical religion had taken place, its followers betook themselves to a narrow and one-sided elaboration of selected phrases from St. Paul's Epistles, and seem to have lost sight of the Gospel of Jesus altogether. The survival of the true ideal of the Church followed. But would it instinctively occur to us to say of many devotees of Church order and ceremonies that they are men who "have been with Jesus"? And when we think of the present strife of tongues, of the vulgar noise and riot of fanatical partisans, the hiss of slander, the trumpeting of catch-words, does it not seem as if from large parts of His Church the Spirit of the real historical Jesus had been banished? The publican and the

sinner stand without because it is not Jesus but the Pharisee that they see within. The perpetual need of the Christian Church is to come face to face with its Founder: to view itself as if the very eyes of Jesus of Nazareth were fixed upon it.

If this return to the lordship of the Son of Man is to be true of the Church, it must be true of each individual Christian. Here is my doctrine—it may be true: here is my devotional practice—it may be divinely appointed: here is my Church—it may be the truest witness to the Mind and Will of God. Yes; and the Sabbath was a divine institution, the keeping of it a divine command. But the vital point remains: Does my orthodoxy, my devotion, my Churchmanship, bring my life nearer to the Spirit of Jesus—to the Son of Man, Lord even of my Sabbath? Does my use of it strengthen in myself or reveal to others His lordship over it? Do I find that as a matter of fact it is becoming natural to me to take Jesus' way of looking at man and God; that communion

with God as of a son with his father is a real part of my delight in life: that I am becoming more humble about myself, more hopeful about others, more resolute in my hatred of every form of evil, more self-denying in my quest of every form of goodness, more eager to bear, more content to suffer, the Cross? In fact, to put it very simply, if Jesus were once again to dwell as a man among men, and I were seen in His company, would other men immediately recognise a likeness between us? These are the great test-questions of our religion. It is indeed disquieting to ask them: would it not be more disquieting to know God's answer? But the very disquietude may arouse a new desire: it may correct the hardening of the heart, and enable the Spirit of Jesus to enter and transform us into His own likeness.

THE CENTURION'S SERVANT

St. Matt. viii. 5; St. Luke vii. 2

THE CENTURION'S SERVANT

St. Matt. viii. 5 ; St. Luke vii. 2

I. HUMILITY AND STRENGTH

It was not the purpose of the writers of the Gospels to describe characters. They told their tale as simply as they could. But their simple narratives have a clearness and transparency that make them mirrors, as it were, in which we can see character revealed. So is it with this Roman Centurion, who besought Jesus to heal his servant. Read the story as it is told by St. Matthew and St. Luke, and you will surely find the portraiture of a man singularly attractive, one who well deserved even the praise of Jesus. He is obviously kind-hearted—his mere household

slave was "dear unto him"—and yet stern, a man who was accustomed to obey and to give orders, to demand and expect obedience. He was a Roman every inch of him, and yet a friendly neighbour to the Jews among whom he lived. He had a faith impatient of the crudities of the Roman mythology, and impressed by the high and reverent conception of God in the Hebrew religion. He had all the simplicity, straightforwardness, and manly courtesy that so often give a unique charm to the personality of the soldier. There was the frank humility of the man who is so sure of his own authority that he leaves it to assert itself—that rare and admirable union of humility and strength. You see it in the two clauses of the passage recording the words he addressed to Jesus. "Lord, trouble not thyself; for I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof; wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee; but say the word and my servant shall be healed." "For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers;

and I say to this one 'Go,' and he goeth: to another 'Come,' and he cometh; and to my servant 'Do this,' and he doeth it." Let us then first learn from him the lesson of the strength of true humility.

That humility is an element of real greatness is not at once obvious to ordinary men. In the ancient world the humble man was rated low in the scale of character. He was presumed to be poor of spirit and wanting in the dignity of manliness. And still the rough judgment of the world is apt to look at humility with an eye of kindly contempt. Sometimes, indeed, it has reason on its side. For there is a false humility—a humility which is itself an affectation—which is infinitely offensive. It is weak because it is unreal. But true humility is anything but artificial and unreal. It is a frank acknowledgment of the real truth about oneself. It resists man's natural tendency to think himself a better man than he really is. This just appreciation of oneself is necessary to strength of character. He who is humble

enough to face the real truth about himself will make no claims which he cannot justify, no attempts where he knows that he cannot succeed. Other men will therefore trust him, and feel that he is strong. On the other hand, to use Aristotle's pithy words: "Vain men are fools as well as ignorant of themselves, and make this plain to all the world; for, not doubting their worth, they undertake honourable offices, and presently stand convicted of incapacity." Even in the ultimate judgment of the world humility is seen to be a mark of strength.

But the humility which Jesus exalted is of a sort deeper and more spiritual. Its root is a just sense of the real truth, not only of self, but of God. It is the reflection in character of the consciousness of God's all-encompassing Presence, in His power and in His holiness. It is this which must check vanity of speech and complacency of soul, and silence all the excuses of self-love, and strip bare the delusions of self-praise. But it is this also which brings strength. It sets our daily life on

final truth. The praise of men will not uplift the man who thinks of God's appraisement. The blame of men will not annoy him, for he will commit it to God's judgment. It must be an enormous strength when a man's life is really stayed on God. Even when the remembrance of the divine holiness crushes him, and he can only say, "God be merciful to me a sinner," the humiliation strengthens him. It liberates him from all delusions, and puts him right with the great reality. It is only when we "humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God" that we can learn the secret of its everlasting strength.

II. SOLDIERLIKE SIMPLICITY

There is another trait in the character of the Centurion which attracts us to him—a trait which won for him the praise of the Master—his simplicity of faith. It is indeed one which has often marked soldiers and sailors who have also been servants of God. Like the Centurion, they are men under

authority—accustomed to respect the commands of their superior officers, to take it for granted that these commands are right and sufficient, and to obey them promptly and thoroughly. They have men under them, and expect the ready obedience which they themselves render to their superiors. Their whole manner of life is reduced to a certain simplicity. Trust, discipline, obedience—these are its simple notes. They carry this simplicity into their religion, accepting God as the great Commander-in-Chief of their souls, and His revelation in Christ as the complete expression of His will. Their one object is to trust implicitly and obey thoroughly. It is not for them to speculate and argue—they are impatient with men who, professing faith in God and Christ, cannot keep from theoretical doubts and practical compromises. "My training as a soldier," said one of them to me the other day, "soon taught me that if I was to be a Christian at all, I must be a Christian out and out." Often, no doubt, they miss a sense of the vastness of the

mystery into which religion brings us: often they misjudge and misunderstand men in whom that sense of mystery is strong; often they rather peremptorily silence their own questionings than find an answer to them, and forget that in God's army the inquirer after truth has a place as well as its obedient servant; often in the very decisiveness of belief they miss the grace of charity. But, for all that, there is something wonderfully attractive and striking in their strong simplicity.

We whose characters have been trained on other lines would do well to have more of it; for, after all, *simplicity*—of faith and of life—is the great end. We may have to fetch a wider compass before we reach it; the straight short cuts by which the soldier-spirit reaches it may not be marked in our own chart of life; but whether by wide circuit or by short cut, we are to make for it. For simplicity is the mark of the sure possession of truth. There are no eddies in the deep waters, no mists in the upper air. Truth,

when it has become deep and clear, will become simple also. No deeper words have ever been spoken than those which fell from the lips of the Truth Incarnate; but they are so impressively and profoundly simple. The disciple who saw farthest into the meaning of that Truth—St. John—gave his testimony in language of deliberate simplicity. How deep and calm and luminous are his simple words—"God is Love," "God is Light," "In Him was Life," "Every one that loveth is born of God and knoweth God." They sound like full-toned bells, and shine like stars. Have you ever heard that wonderful song, "The Young Nun"? If so, you will remember how the music swells with the tumult of yearning and passion until it merges in the quiet strong notes of the deep Alleluia of truth attained. Even so, all our wanderings and questionings reach their end in the simplicity of faith.

If therefore we have to come to hold any great truth as true for us, we do well to treat it simply—with a simplicity whose only

limit is reverence. Indeed, the more simply we treat it the more it lays hold of us and possesses us. Do we believe that the truest thing which can be said about the eternal God is that He is towards His creatures as a father towards his children? Then we are never so near the truth as when in utter simplicity we pray to Him as His children. The child's prayer is the deepest as well as the simplest expression of truth. Do we believe that conscience speaks to us with the authority of God? Then let us obey it always with prompt, instinctive obedience. We cannot surely argue with it, expostulate, try to beat down its terms, offer it a compromise. That were to bargain like a packman with the Most High God. Do we believe that the character of Jesus is the supreme law of life? Then let us deliberately set about to copy it—resist the temptation of the last word, hasten to be the first to forgive, welcome the calls of sacrifice—in short, take His word for it that there is no other road but the following of His example, by which

we can reach mastery of self and peace of life. Do we believe that the duty which lies before us is set there by the all-controlling Providence of God? Then let us not complain of it, but advance to meet it with the strenuous cheerfulness of the soldier who has heard the word of command to go forward and take the position in front of him.

III. AFFECTION AND AUTHORITY

There is yet another feature of the character of the Centurion from which we may learn a useful lesson. His servant — his "bond-servant," we are told by St. Luke— was "dear unto him." It must have been a very real affection that would lead one in his position to show such anxiety for a household slave. We discern its ardour in the words of St. Matthew: "He came beseeching Him." Yet he was plainly a man of authority, who exacted and expected prompt obedience. "I

say to my servant 'Do this,' and he doeth it." It is this blending of affection and authority that strikes our notice. It is a combination which contains one of the first principles of true home-life.

Consider it only in regard to the relationship of parents with their children. There is always the danger—never more obvious than at the present time—of too much affection and too little authority. Affection is allowed to degenerate into indulgence. In the softness of the times, children are petted and humoured, and allowed a familiar way of speech and behaviour towards their parents which would have shocked a sterner age. There are few truths which are in greater need of assertion than that mere affection is positively harmful unless it is blended with authority. Two qualities are essential to the equipment of strong character—respect and obedience; and they are qualities singularly lacking in the present day. The lack of them is largely due to the increasing laxity of the element of authority in our homes. Trust,

respect, deference, rendering honour to whom honour is due—we all complain of the want of these, of the absence of their old signs, of the impudence and familiarity of the young in the treatment of their elders and betters. But is not one source of the evil the habits of home-life? Children are educated in the virtues not by theories but by habits; they will become deferential in character only if they are trained to observe the outward signs of deference in speech and manner. Can we then view without misgiving the ease and familiarity with which children are allowed to speak to their parents—the primary representatives of authority? It is not uncommon nowadays to hear them addressed by nicknames; the old titles of respect, "Father," "Mother," are exchanged for every variety of silly diminutives. It comes as a relief—alas! too rare—to hear a boy address his father as "Sir." It is a foolish affection which allows children to treat their parents as mere grown-up playmates. It weakens respect at its very source. And *obedience*, prompt and imme-

diate—again we complain of the lack of it, of the way in which boys and girls of all classes resent its restraints, and like to be their own masters. But the mischief begins at home. Parents will not insist that at home their word is to be law. They will not resolutely show that they mean to be obeyed. Yet it is not too much to say that obedience is the very religion of childhood. It is the high responsibility of the earthly father to represent to the child the Father who is in heaven. And how shall a child be trained to obey its conscience as the voice of God if it is allowed with impunity to disregard the will of its parents? The over-affectionate, over-indulgent parent is doing a cruel wrong to the character of his child if he deprives it of the instinct of obedience—builds it on the rubble of mere emotion, instead of on the foundation-stone of obedience. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom"; and the fear of God can only be taught through the fear of the parent. The word is not true in the former relationship and false in the latter.

In both perfect love casteth out fear; but only because fear is made perfect in love. The true love involves the fear. Mere affection enfeebles character; it strengthens only when it is blended with authority.

The same principle applies to all to whom the care of the young is in any way entrusted: to the teacher, say, who stands to the English child over so much of its life in the place of a parent. Here, again, the first and fundamental lessons to be taught are respect and obedience. The misplaced affectionateness which dispenses with all outward signs of deference, the good-natured indulgence which ignores minor acts of disobedience, may purchase a certain degree of momentary popularity; but the price paid is the violation of trust. The pleasure of the teacher is bought at the cost of the character of the child. The saying that children must be ruled by affection is apt to be a very mischievous half-truth. Nay, it defeats often its own partial ends; for children are so far like animals and the child-races that they really give their

deepest loyalty and affection to those whom they have learned to respect and obey.

IV. THE SURPRISE OF THE GREAT DAY

The Centurion was a lover of the Hebrew nation: he had built them a synagogue: he was one of those earnest seekers after truth who had been attracted by the depth and purity of the Hebrew conception of God; but he was a Roman; he was without the Covenant. Jesus was touched by the readiness and simplicity of faith in this uncircumcised Gentile — so striking in its contrast with the prejudices and obstinacy of the Jews. "Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you that many shall come from the east and from the west, and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, but the sons of the kingdom shall be cast forth into the outer darkness."

Nothing is more impressive in the teaching of the Master and Judge of human life than this, that He made inward personal character, not outward orthodoxy of belief or privilege of position, the final test. In the last judgment all the children of men are brought to the same level and judged by the same standard—the moral quality of their life. He did not undervalue the need of truth. How could He—He who was the truth made manifest, who had come into the world because through its ignorance of the truth mankind was lost? God surely would not have intervened in human history with so momentous a disclosure of the truth unless the knowledge of it was of supreme importance—unless He knew that the true life could not be lived without it. "This *is* the life eternal, that they might know Thee and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent." We must believe that ultimately a true faith is necessary to a true life. But the final object of the faith is the life. And in this sphere of probation there is a vast difference between

those who knowing not the truth yet *do* it, and those who knowing the truth yet do it not. The former are in the way of progress and of hope, they are on the lines that will lead them to the truth. "He that doeth the will shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God." The latter are in the way of loss, of retreat, of abandonment. The truth will be not their reward but their judge. The former will reach the kingdom of the Light, the latter will be cast out into the outer darkness.

Yet there are multitudes who seem to think that, because of some orthodoxy of belief, they have a vested right to the kingdom, of which they cannot be deprived. The Pharisees were a conspicuous instance. But, let us remember again, the place which they fill in the words of Jesus was due not only to the fact that they were His chief opponents on earth, but to the fact that their temperament would always be the besetting sin of His professed adherents. For just in proportion to the standard of deep

and exacting spiritual requirement which any doctrine demands will be the danger of hypocrisy in the profession of it. And who can think that if Jesus were now to visit His Church, His denunciations of the hypocrisy of its members would be less terrible and less deserved than were His denunciations of the hypocrisy of the Scribes and Pharisees? Consider the contrast between the multitude of professing Christians and the rarity of the Christian life. You shall meet men who declare that they have been converted, and who loudly profess their "acceptance of the scheme of salvation," who yet display no single sign of the self-sacrifice, the humility, the charity of the Christian life. And you shall meet other men, who may only be, like the Centurion, inquirers after truth, who have a wish to believe, beset with difficulties —nay, who may be ignorant of the Christian faith, and be without the pale of the Christian Church, who yet are capable of conspicuous self-sacrifice, who are always doing good, who are kind at heavy cost. Can we doubt which

of these two classes are the true children of the kingdom? There is but one word to describe the callousness of response to the spiritual claims of Christianity, the incapacity for all real self-sacrifice for Christ's sake, which mark the mass of contented members of Christ's Church—it is the word "appalling." It is the very mystery of iniquity—infinitely more disquieting and depressing than the problem of the hosts of the heathen, whether at home or abroad. It may be that we shall only realise what it means when the surprise of the Great Day comes upon us, and we behold the outcasts entering the kingdom and the professing Christians cast out. He that is without hypocrisy among us, let him first cast a stone at the Pharisees.

It was a wet and wintry night in the slums of a great town. A woman rushed out from a miserable house of iniquity as I passed and clutched my arm. "There's a young man dying in the house: come and pray for him." She led me through a kitchen

filled with men and women such as I pray I may never see again—too deeply sunk in a stupor of drink and lust to notice us. At the top of a rickety staircase we reached an attic, where on a mattress on the floor a young man lay stretched, hollow and pallid, in the last stages of consumption. "Pray with him," she whispered, and turned to go. I asked her to stay. "My God, no," was her reply, "I'm a bad woman: I won't stay to spoil the prayer." And she went. The young man told me his story. He had wandered into the town, penniless, to die. The woman had met him and had pitied him. He was dying: he had nothing to give her. But she took him to the attic: for three weeks she had nursed and tended him. With her earnings—God forgive them!—she had bought him simple delicacies; she had day after day fought her way with them through the wolves in the kitchen: and her face was bruised with the struggles. "God bless her!" he muttered. In a day he was dead. At the graveside there was but one other present

with the clerk and the parish undertaker—the young woman, her shawl drawn over her head! At the end I turned to speak to her and thank her; but she had gone in the pouring rain, and I could not overtake her. I never saw her again. But I thought of the words, "The publican and the harlot shall enter into the kingdom of heaven before you." Could my life show at the Great Day any such record of self-sacrifice and compassion?

V. FAITH AND FACT

The Centurion, having made up his mind that Jesus' power of healing was to be trusted, trusted it to the full. He was content that Jesus should only speak the word. The word was at one moment spoken and fulfilled. "'Go thy way; as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee, and the servant was healed in that hour."

These words express one of the laws of life in the kingdom of God. The same law is

expressed in its widest form in the saying, "To him that hath shall be given." Here it may be paraphrased thus—the measure of attainment is proportionate to the measure of expectation. Large results depend upon large expectations. "As thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee."

We have been thinking of that most baffling of all difficulties—the condition of the Christian Church. Take any community of baptized Christians, consider what they are ideally: a number of persons pledged to an intensely spiritual and heroic standard of life, nothing less than the likeness of Jesus, possessed by His very Spirit dwelling within them, who is longing with the fervour of infinite love and able with the sureness of infinite power to transform them into that likeness—persons claiming and asserting this truth in the language which they accept and use. Then consider what they are in fact. Are they as a whole in any real way—apart from certain traditional customs and phrases—distinguishable from ordinary

respectable men who make no such pretensions?

Now, of course, in this sphere of probation and struggle the ideal is never the real: it is still the day of aspiration and effort, not of attainment. We cannot have on earth the conditions of heaven. The utmost that a man can give, or that God expects, in loyalty to his ideal, is sincere wishing and honest trying. But if there be wishing and trying there will be movement—there cannot be stagnation: and if there be movement, it is progress: for then the Spirit of God can act: and what He begins He will end. If therefore there be no movement and no progress, it means that there is neither sincere wishing nor honest trying; that, in short, the ideal has gone out of the life. That is the root cause of the stagnation of Christians. They have ceased to believe that they are really and literally meant to be Christlike. It is a mere accepted phrase—not a living and inspiring hope that they—just they—are to become like Christ. Probably, to be quite

honest, many of them, in their heart of hearts, do not wish it: it would involve a transformation from which they shrink. There are indulgences which they wish to keep, sacrifices which they wish to avoid or postpone. They are simply what they wish to be: their measure of attainment is proportionate to their measure of expectation.

On the other hand, if we revive and enlarge our expectations, if we really believe that Christ can be "formed within us," and make that the prevailing purpose of daily life, if we are prepared to make any sacrifice which it may demand, then gradually but surely it will come to pass. That is certain. For every aspiration which is sincere—which, that is to say, carries the will with it—every effort which is honest up to the point of our ability, is a claim upon the Spirit of God which He cannot reject. It enables Him to act: ours the effort, His the power. There is no power in mere effort, but it brings the power of God. We shall be simply what we

wish to be. I cannot do more than try: but God's Spirit in me will succeed. It is for me to "go my way" — straight forward: and as I have believed, so will it be done unto me.

THE FEEDING OF THE MULTITUDE

St. Mark viii. 1

THE FEEDING OF THE MULTITUDE

St. Mark viii. 1

I. IDEAL AND FACT

THE familiar story of Jesus feeding the multitude sets the mind moving on many and far-reaching lines of thought. We might meditate on the words, "I have compassion on the multitude," and find that they mark an epoch in the story of man's life on earth—the entry upon the stage of the new sentiment and motive of pity for the vulgar crowd, with a wonderful career before it in the spread of philanthropy and civic freedom. Or we might study the significance of our Lord's manifest care for the body as well as for the

soul. But there is a simpler lesson on which we rather choose to dwell — the greatness of little opportunities used with faith and thanksgiving.

The disciples were dismayed at the contrast between the desire of their Master to feed that great multitude and the poverty of the resources which they actually had with which to fulfil it. Seven loaves and a few small fishes, and a crowd of four thousand — surely it was impossible. How indeed could it be possible to fill these men with food there in a desert place? But the power of a great compassion takes just these poor opportunities, just these insignificant resources, gives God thanks for them, uses them, and lo! they are found to be enough, and more than enough, to feed the multitude.

We, too, are often dismayed at the contrast between the scale of our actual life and the ideal which our religion sets before us. We know the ideal which is God's wish for us — that we should become Christlike, sons rejoicing in the fellowship of the Father; but

we know also how strangely insignificant and ineffective are the actual circumstances of our lives through which we are to make it real. Our education has been imperfect. Our power of thought is very limited. Our imagination is dull and languid. Our leisure for meditation and reflection is scanty. Our position exposes us to persistent temptations. Our daily work is cramping and monotonous. Our whole life is set in lines most unheroic. It is a desert place, and we have only seven loaves and a few small fishes. Yet we cannot mistake God's wish, it is clearly set before us. We are to be perfect; we are to become holy; we are to be partakers of the divine nature; we are to share the life and attain the likeness of the Perfect Man. Every Christian, whatever his circumstances may be, is pledged to a heroic standard of life. It is, indeed, a puzzling contrast—a heroic life to be lived in circumstances unheroic, an ideal to be realised through facts strangely alien to it.

How are we to adjust the proportions? Sometimes we are tempted to do so by

belittling the ideal. We call it a "counsel of perfection." We drift into the way of thinking that it may be possible for a few—for men with a genius for religion; but that it is not really meant for all. We say, *e.g.*, that the Sermon on the Mount is to be followed "in the spirit," a phrase which first means "vaguely," and often ultimately "not at all." We come to regard the language of the New Testament as a mere exalted manner of speech, a sort of divine rhetoric. It is the poetry of religion—not intended to be literally carried out in the prose of daily life. Or else, if conscience refuses to be eased by such indolent sophistries, we tend to become discontented with our opportunities. We grow querulous and faint-hearted. How is it possible for me, the man I am, in the circumstances in which I am placed, to fulfil the Christian ideal? If I were like so and so; if I had his talents, his imagination, his opportunities; or, if some wonderful vision of Christ were given to me; if a warm and evident love of God had come into my

experience, then it might be possible for me. But, being as I am, it is all beyond me. "Whence shall we be able to fill these men with bread here in a desert place?"

But listen to the divine teaching. "How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven." Only seven, it is true; but take these seven and feed the multitude with them. You will find they are enough. You are only a weak, harassed, tempted, unheroic soul, set in the midst of very trying and uncongenial circumstances, it is true; but take just what you have and are, and believe resolutely that it is sufficient for these great things. *You*, just as and where you are, begin to love God and your neighbour for God's sake; set about to become like Christ; and you will find, as you use them trustfully and faithfully, that your opportunities are enough. You will find that Christ can fulfil His will and work His likeness within you in the kitchen, the yard, the shop, the counting-house, the street. Then take, give thanks, and break.

II. THE GREAT POSSIBILITIES OF SMALL OPPORTUNITIES

Under the touch of Christ the seven loaves and few small fishes were as sufficient for the feeding of a multitude as a vast supply of stores. Divine compassion linked with divine power made the apparent contrast between the smallness of the opportunity and the greatness of the demand vanish. So the contrasts which we are so apt to make between the different opportunities of human lives would be much less striking if we looked at them from the divine point of view. From the height of a great tower inequalities which are obvious on the plain disappear, and everything is reduced to a common level. So from the height of God's infinity and eternity all scales of life are as one. King and cottager, scholar and peasant, saint and wayfarer, are in point of greatness or littleness one. There is no respect of persons with God. From the divine point of view, greatness consists not

in the opportunities of life, abundant or insignificant, but in the spirit which makes use of them. And the true art of life is to learn to look at it with God's eyes. To do little things in a great spirit, to use little opportunities for a great end—this is the way of greatness. Greatheart is God's only nobleman. In the kingdom of God it is greatness of spirit, not greatness of opportunity that ennobles. Moral judgment which seeks to frame itself on God's lines pays no attention to outward accidents, only to inward reality. It considers not extent of circumstances, but intensity of spirit. The qualities which make the true worth of life are indeed independent of circumstances. The love of a mother for her child is as great and as beautiful whether it be seen at a cottage door or in Rafael's picture of the Madonna. Neighbourly kindness is the same, whether it be shown by a charwoman "sitting up" with her sick friend in a back street or by the Pope washing the pilgrims' feet in St. Peter's at Rome. The struggles of the young clerk, alone in a great

city, to resist the temptations of the flesh are as heroic as the struggles of St. Anthony in the desert. The patient endurance of some commonplace domestic trouble invests the sufferer with some of the greatness of the Cross of Christ. In the divine eye it is the spirit alone that counts for greatness.

Thus we learn to pay little heed to the apparent smallness of our opportunities. It does not affect their moral possibilities. We can eat and drink to the glory of God. Only let us act, always and in all circumstances, in a great spirit.

Brother Lawrence was nothing more romantic or exalted than a monastery cook, but he could say, "The time of business does not with me differ from the time of prayer, and in the noise and clatter of my kitchen, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in as great tranquillity as if I were upon my knees at the Blessed Sacrament." *To possess God in tranquillity*, surely that is to come very near perfection, to have learned the

secret of the life of Christ—and it was obtained in a kitchen! To take our lives as they are, and to live them for the love of God, quietly, simply, faithfully, that is the only rule of great living. The alchemist of the Middle Ages spent his life in the search of a stone which was to turn all it touched to gold. The Christian has not far to seek. He finds it in using little opportunities in a great spirit. You remember George Herbert's poem—as deep as it is simple—on "The Elixir":

Teach me, my God and King,
In all things Thee to see,
And what I do in anything,
To do it as for Thee.

All may of Thee partake:
Nothing can be so mean
Which with this tincture, *for Thy sake*,
Will not grow bright and clean.

A servant with this clause
Makes drudgery divine;
Who sweeps a room as for Thy laws
Makes that and the action fine.

This is the famous stone
That turneth all to gold;
For that which God doth touch and own
Cannot for less be told.

III. THE SPIRIT OF THANKFULNESS

The disciples were distressed by the smallness of their opportunities; but Jesus "gave thanks" for them, and they sufficed. His Eucharist gave the seven loaves power to feed the multitude. It is by the spirit of thankfulness that we are to make our small opportunities great. Thanksgiving is the primary ingredient of that "elixir of life" which turns all it touches to gold. If our life seems to be set among common things, and to have in its circumstances few heroic possibilities, there are two alternatives before us: one is to bemoan our lot and grumble at its conditions; the other is to give thanks and break—to do the best we can with our lot, and be thankful that we can do anything at all. The one dooms our opportunities to

perpetual littleness; the other, by putting a great spirit into them, makes them capable of great things. For things are really just what we make them. Man is always master of his circumstances. He cannot always control what they are in themselves; but he *can* control what they are to mean in his life. It is not within my control whether I live in a palace or in a semi-detached villa, but it is within my control whether I am vulgar in the one or noble in the other. I may not possess the power of understanding a great fugue of Bach, but at least I can hear the lark singing in the crisp air and the plash of the waves along the shore, and the quality of noble joy is as real in the one case as in the other. This mastery of circumstances, this power of getting true and noble life out of them, depends on my own temperament, whether it be one of discontent or one of thankfulness. The spirit gives its own hue to the circumstances which it encounters.

It is indeed surprising to find what mate-

rials for praise the thankful temperamen. can find in common things. Two men meet and greet one another in an Edinburgh street. A common enough occurrence, truly; and one which ninety-nine out of every hundred of the passers-by would never notice. But a man of thankfulness—Robert Louis Stevenson — sees it with other eyes, and writes: "They came forward with a little run and *leaped* at each other's hands. You never saw such bright eyes as they both had. It put one in a good humour to see it." Such sights are never wanting to brighten the eyes out of which a thankful spirit looks upon the world. Do we give thanks as we might for the *ordinariness*, so to speak, the common run, of little courtesies? It is surely a good world, with a good God above it, in which I can count upon a civil answer and a smile of readiness in the giving of it, when I ask the way in a common street. I pass along a dingy back-way in this town; but a moment's attention shows me as I pass a young mother playing with her crowing baby, and a tattered

child superbly happy entertaining her tattered friends at a feast of mud-pies. A deformed cripple hobbles by, but his father's hand rests gently on his shoulder, and the brightness of his upturned eye transforms the poor shapeless body. There in one moment are three sights seen which ought to make me lift up the heart and give thanks. And children—do we ever give thanks for God's gift of children? These little visions of innocence and brightness, carrying into the most sordid places the gladness of their eyes, the grace of their actions, the witchery of their play, by which in a moment the back-yard becomes a place where heroes fight or fairies dance—and they are everywhere. A world where children live is surely a world which has a loving Father—a world for which to give thanks.

Of course, there is the shadow of "the other side," but we do not lighten it by dwelling upon it. We cannot escape it, we cannot explain it, but we can often transform it. The poverty is there, but there is also

the neighbourly helpfulness which it inspires. The weakness is there, but there is also the instinct of strength to support it. The deformity is there; but there is also the pity which goes out to it. The sickness is there; but there is also the cheerful fortitude which bears it. The death is there; but there is also the hope which looks beyond it. The sin is there; but there is also the Saviour who died to pardon it. We cannot help seeing the cloud; let us then rather look for the silver lining. It is easier perhaps to be gloomy; but that way lies no help for ourselves or for others. It is often hard to be cheerful; but the effort keeps the world from sinking under the burden of its own calamities. "We are saved by hope." Hopeful men are the saviours of their brethren, and the spring of hope is the deliberate spirit of thankfulness. The disciples doubtless shared their Master's compassion; but so long as they thought of the desert and the fewness of the loaves they could do nothing. The compassion of Jesus was one that gave thanks.

and lo! the desert became the place of a banquet, and the seven loaves fed the multitude.

IV. THE BOLDNESS OF THE SPIRIT

When Jesus had given thanks over the seven loaves, at once He brake them. He did not—let us speak with reverence—He did not wait till they had multiplied into four thousand. He took them when they were only seven, and they became four thousand. So must it be with the use of the opportunities which we have. We have to take them as they are, and boldly venture on great things with them. Christians differ in their opportunities, not in their call. No matter what the opportunities may be, they are to love God in them, to become Christlike through them, to save their fellows in Christ's name with them. The essence of success in this spiritual emprise is immediacy of action. Whatever our actual circumstances may be,

we are to give thanks for them and to begin with them as they are, not wait till they are different.

We are apt to shrink from this boldness of spirit. We hesitate to make great claims on God, or set great ideals before ourselves, until something has happened—a moving of the waters, a clearer illumination, a more intense experience. Hence we make no progress, because we never make a beginning. In the world of the spirit, even more than in the world of action, "he who hesitates is lost." He who is ever expecting future opportunities misses those that are laid at his feet. In the world of affairs, it is just this power of immediate and instinctive action that marks the man of genius. The prudent man calculates the chances; the man of genius seizes the moment. He cannot always tell why. On a review of probabilities, his act often seems indefensible. But it succeeds. This was, for example, the way of Nelson. He thought and puzzled and elaborated plans, like other

men, less ably than other men; but his decisive acts came always by a sudden instinct. In the spiritual world it is the same kind of instinct boldly trusted that almost always justifies itself. We call it here not genius but inspiration; the human spirit uplifted by prayer reaches the Divine, and catches His fire and works His will. It is surely the experience of every man who tries to live in the Spirit, that when by, it may be, a momentary prayer he has put himself within His power, the instinct that follows, if boldly accepted, proves itself to be right. Sometimes he is deceived, he knows not why. But such occasional disappointment does not disconcert him. It is better to be deceived in these bold ventures of the spirit than to stagnate in safety for fear of making them. "Greatheart was deceived, 'Very well!' said Greatheart."

There is indeed a very inspiring warrant for this boldness of the spirit. It is that the grace of God does not wait upon, but is ever

ready for, the will of man. We know—and baptism is God's guarantee of it—that from the very first we possess the power of the Spirit. We have never to wait for it, but always to claim it. God never wills us to do anything without giving us beforehand all the grace we need for the doing of it. He tells me, "Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind," to love Him, and my brother for Him, to be Christlike, to become "perfect," because He has already bestowed upon me the Spirit of Christ to help me. Therefore I am not to wait, to measure with a sinking spirit the want of correspondence between anything I have and am and all that He wills me to do and be. I am to begin at once. If I busy myself with anxious inquiries as to my own endowments, I fail to grasp that all-sufficient endowment of the Spirit with which He has empowered me. If my eyes are set upon my poor self, I fail to see His Presence standing at my side. Let me not falter out these timorous questionings—"Do I *feel* that God

is with me? Do I *feel* that I can become one of His saints?" It is not feelings that I want, but faith—faith to claim and trust to the pledged sufficiency of His grace.

JESUS WALKING ON THE SEA

St. Matt. xiv. 22 ; St. Mark vi. 46 ; St. John vi. 15

JESUS WALKING ON THE SEA

St. Matt. xiv. 22 ; St. Mark vi. 46 ; St. John vi. 15

I. DETACHMENT

A GREAT space in the Ideal Life was given to solitude. Jesus continually withdrew Himself from the crowd, even from His own friends, to be alone with the Father. So in the passage before us we read, "after He had sent the multitudes away, He went up into the mountain apart to pray, and when even was come He was there alone." It was His way of realising His undisturbed communion with the Father. His chosen rest was the solitude in which He retreated from the bustle of the world to the refreshing calm of the eternal. He was the Image of God, in which we too

are made; and if we are to realise our true life, of which His was the model, we must learn to be alone. It is in solitude that we discover the secret of detachment, and realise that supreme relationship which is the fount at once of greatness and peace—the relationship of the individual soul and God.

It is the whole tendency of the times "to depersonalise man": we live, move, think in crowds. The typical life of modern England is the life of the crowded town. Even when we are reading alone, it is the newspaper or magazine that we read. The old habit of reading master-books was one which helped men to think for themselves; but reading the newspaper is just listening to the voices of the crowd. And the atmosphere of the crowd is always one of hurry, restlessness, confusion.

> We, brought forth and reared in hours
> Of change, alarm, surprise,
> What shelter to grow ripe is ours,
> What leisure to grow wise?

We lose the capacity for solitude: it makes

us feel awkward and uncomfortable; we are companions to the crowd and strangers to ourselves. There is doubtless the other side of the truth—that no man can live to himself; we are knit in the kinship of one body to our fellows; we have our share and our place by God's will in the multitudinous life which ceaselessly throbs and toils in the world He made. Nay, God Himself is in that life: and we are with God even in the multitude. But God, in His own supreme personality, is also above the multitude of His creatures. The old words describing Him as resting on the seventh day to behold His works and declare them "very good" teach the truth that if He is present in these works of His, He is also above them. We too must keep our Sabbath-days—the times of rest and withdrawal—in order that we may assert the supremacy of our personal spirit, that we may rise above the six days' labour in the crowd and view it from that standpoint of the eternal, and recover ourselves and our true place within it; otherwise it absorbs and

overwhelms us, and the spirit is tied and bound to it and cannot rise to God. There must be Sabbaths of detachment from our circumstances if we are to be their masters, not their slaves.

Solitude, then, is necessary for communion with God. It is in silence that the final truths assert and reveal themselves. Speech, the language of the crowd, limits and conceals the truth—gives us at best, even the speech of wise books, only aspects of the truth. The wisest of men can utter only the half of what he knows : and that is the half that reaches us. Even when we attempt to speak our own thoughts, we may make them clearer, but by that very fact we arrest and limit them. For, as Maeterlinck truly tells us, the ideas that are not clear are the ideas that are most potent and bring us nearest to God. They are

> **The intuitions, grasps of guess**
> **Which pull the more into the less,**
> **Making the finite comprehend**
> **Infinity.**

It is through the intuitions of silence—the deep soul-convictions which escape words and cannot brook the atmosphere of the crowd and its chatter—that we reach God. "Be still, and know that I am God."

And solitude is necessary also for a just apprehension of the crowd and of our place within it. In his "Fruits of Solitude"—a little book which is well worth reading—William Penn writes: "Till we are persuaded to stop and step a little aside out of the noisy Crowd and incumbering Hurry of the world, and calmly take a prospect of things, it will be impossible we should be able to make a right judgment of ourselves. That is it—to step aside and take a prospect of things. The wise man is he who from time to time withdraws from the crowd and looks at it from the standpoint of the eternal, and then enters it as one who has discovered his own true path and place in it. It is in solitude that we learn to adjust our eyes to the true perspective of things. "Look, therefore," says St. Paul, that wisest and most practical

of mystics, "look carefully how ye walk, not as unwise, but as wise, buying up the opportunity because the days are evil." That wary look is one of the best gifts of solitude.

II. THE CONTRARY WIND

"The boat was now in the midst of the sea, distressed by the waves, for the wind was contrary." There are many who will find in these words a very faithful parable of their life. We are, all of us, mariners in this sea of life. We put off from the shore in all the gaiety of childhood, embarked on a happy venture. In the days of youth—the days of our inspiring illusions — we bound along under the fair wind of hope and ambition. But by the time we reach the midst of the sea—that period of middle age when the illusions disappear and the grim realities of life take their place—most of us find that the wind is contrary and the waves distressing. The wind shifts and turns against us,

and we must take to the oars, the heavy oars of toil, and be thankful if we can only feel that we are making some sort of headway. It is our appointed lot: we have our share of the wind and tide, but sooner or later we must take to the oars.

Well, there is nothing for it but the spirit of the mariner. He does not quarrel with the changes and chances of the weather, he accepts them as a matter of course, and makes the best of them: "It is all in the day's work." And you shall see him, when the wind shifts and the tide turns, stop his song, put out his pipe, and without a grumble take to the oars and pull his way along with dogged perseverance. The foolishest thing that a man can do is to quarrel with his lot: no grumbling will change it. If there is no wind, all his whistling will not fetch it: if the wind is contrary, he may call aloud to the four corners of the earth, but they will not heed him. If he will not take to his oars, and do his best, he will only drift on to the rocks. There is no way of living except

the way of taking life on the terms on which it is given to us. It is too late, when we are in the midst of the sea, to wish that we had not started; and it is as much as we have any right to hope for that we shall reach the haven sometime and somehow, with boat taut and spirit thankful.

We may not quarrel with the contrary wind, but we can learn to value it. It is, after all, struggle and toil—taking to the oars—that tests the stuff we are made of. No one ever became a master mariner by paddling in the calm or sitting still under a fair wind; and no one ever became a master-liver—a man, in short, of power, resource, and self-control—by "having a good time." It is the contrary wind that makes manhood. Again, it is the contrary wind that binds us to our brother-men. If we were to sail along under fair winds, each lying at his ease, life would teach us nothing but lazy selfishness. The contrary wind gives us the fellowship of the oars—the need of keeping time with one another, of each helping the others while he

pulls away on his own thwart. No finer sound ever rises to heaven than the comrade-song of the rowers. Surely we all know that the best things life has brought us—the things that bring the deepest satisfaction—have been the chances of service. Help to the weak, cheer to the struggling, sympathy to the sufferer—these are the true prizes of life. Of all the praises that reward us, none is so sweet or strong as the thanks of a brother-man. And even if no thanks come for our help or sympathy, we know in ourselves that we are better men for the mere giving it.

Lastly, it is only the contrary wind that can bring the joy of the harbour. To round the breakwater, with its cheering light; to hear the waves breaking on the far side of it and see the tempest fly across the waste of water and know that it can buffet us no longer; to ship the weary oars, and pass from the wind and darkness into the brightness, warmth, and rest of home—oh, it is more than worth all the toil and the trouble of the

voyage! Surely the joys of home are only for the traveller, and of rest only for the toiler. There is no such thing as rest for the idler. It remains only for "the people of God"—the men who have taken life as He gave it to them, and made themselves men by the toil of it, and given Him thanks in the midst of it, and trusted to Him for the way of it. "They that go down to the sea in ships and have their business in great waters, these men see the works of the Lord and His wonders in the deep. . . . He bringeth them to the haven where they would be."

III. THE DIVINE SYMPATHY

"Seeing them distressed in rowing, for the wind was contrary unto them, about the fourth watch of the night, Jesus cometh unto them, walking on the sea." The disciples were tossing and struggling in the midst of the sea, with waves distressing and wind contrary, their minds and bodies set on the

mere weary task of the oars. But from His mountain—raised above the waters in the calm of His communion with the Father—Jesus was watching the little specks of the boats, black against the moonlit waves, and noticing the sore trouble of their toil. He arose to teach them a lesson for life. He came past them, walking on the very waves that distressed them, asserting His divine supremacy there. They were to learn that even the distressing waves of life might be the way along which the power and calm of His presence would come to them.

A few pages back we were in the heroic mood. We were brave to accept and even welcome the contrary wind—the discipline of struggle—as the appointed lot of life. But the question will obtrude itself, "Who cares for the issue of the struggle?" We toil and persevere, and test our manhood at the oars, and death is the harbour that we reach. All voyages across the sea of life come to that end. What matters it, whether we reach it with the boat strong and safe, or in the

collapse of a wreck? It is death either way And if nothing has watched the struggle but the pitiless indifference of things, is it after all worth making? It is, I think, in "Middlemarch" that George Eliot describes a story of inner hopes and fears as being laid bare before "the merciful eyes of solitude." Truly, a strange adjective! The thought takes mercy out of Nature, and leaves it a mere huge and callous Force, alike indifferent and irresistible; it brings before us that awful spectre of the dead socket out of which no eye is looking. There is, indeed, infinite pathos in the struggles of men; but the thought of it would be unbearable if we had no faith in an Infinite Pity responding to it. Mankind would soon lose heart and throw down the oars if the light of faith in a divine sympathy went out.

It is this need of a divine assurance that there is a heart of sympathy at the root of things which Christ came to satisfy. He who was one with the Eternal Being watches from His mountain-top the toilers in the

deep. Still in the darkest hours, when we are in the midst of the sea, labouring at the oars, the eye of a divine compassion is upon us, noting the toil, and waiting to give the reward of rest. There is a striking chapter in that fine book "Marius the Epicurean" which gives expression to the longing of man buffeted by the contrary wind. It ends thus: "A protest comes out of the very depths of man's radically hopeless condition in the world, with the energy of one of those suffering yet prevailing deities, of which old poetry tells. Dared one hope that there is a heart, even as ours, in that divine 'assistant' of one's thoughts, a heart even as mine, behind this vain show of things!" Christ gives the answer:

> So through the thunder comes a human voice,
> Saying, "O heart I made, a heart beats here."

But how much more than one could have dared to hope was the fulness of His answer! He not only declared the divine sympathy, He entered the human struggle. "Jesus

cometh to them walking on the sea." It was not enough that God should declare the divine sympathy in a word: He chose also to declare it in a Life. There can be no doubt of a sympathy which issues in self-sacrifice; and we see the Heart of God in the Cross of Jesus Christ. All the toil and struggle and bitter disappointment, and hard-kept loyalty of human life, He took them upon Himself. He entered the distressing waves: He came unto us walking upon the sea. He who ordained the hard law of the Cross Himself submitted to it, to prove by His self-sacrifice that it comes from a Will of love; and He transformed it by bidding us not only take it, but take it after Him. It is through the fellowship of the Cross that He comes most closely to us.

We are, indeed, slow to believe it. "When the disciples saw Him walking on the sea they were troubled, saying, 'It is an apparition'; and they cried out for fear." So we, when some special blow of the contrary wind buffets us, when some cross meets us,

are troubled; it seems to us as a spectre, the spectre of a power alien and bewildering We shrink from it and cry out for fear. But we are to hear coming from it the very voice of the love of God, saying, "Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid." That is the greatest of all gifts of sight — to see the Crucified on every cross. For when we see and greet Him there, supreme and calm, He gives us His own supremacy and calmness. We conquer our crosses by bearing them with Him.

IV. THE TRIAL OF FAITH

We have become familiar with the message of the Cross. But whenever we think out quietly what it means, and in some measure realise the wonder of its news—the presence of the love of God in the very mysteries which seem to hide it—it must be a heart of stone which does not thrill with a response of gratitude. When we have by faith grasped the truth that Christ comes nearest

to us on the Cross, then, if His presence be the thing our soul longs to have, we are bold to ask Him to bid us come to Him there. We almost seek the Cross, that we may find Him on it. But, if our wish be granted, and the Cross comes, it is very different; we who were so bold in faith are so feeble in fact. Our poor weak human nature quails and sinks beneath it. It is easy to be thus bold about the cross in prospect; it is very hard to keep the boldness when the reality is upon us."

That was the experience of St. Peter "Peter answered Him and said, 'Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee upon the waters.' And He said, 'Come.' And Peter went down from the boat and walked upon the waters to come to Jesus. But when he saw the wind he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out."

It was the difference between the impulse of faith and the test of the reality. The impulse was right, and we are not to check these sudden outbursts of true emotion.

The will is slow and late, and needs these emotions running ahead to exhort and inspire it; only, we must be continually bringing the will up to the level of the faith. It is when the testing reality comes upon a faith that has too far outrun the will that it disconcerts and overthrows. The reserve of the settled strong purpose of the will comes up too late.

Again, it was when St. Peter turned his eyes from the Master and let them dwell on the waves rising under the stress of the wind, that he began to sink. So, if our faith that it is Christ who calls us to come to Him on the Cross is to prevail, it must be thorough and fixed; we must keep our eyes fixed steadily upon Him. If we allow our imagination to dwell on the stern and fearful actualities of our cross they will overcome us. Suppose, *e.g.*, that our cross is the death of some one dearly beloved; then, if we try by the vivid imagination of grief to realise the bitterness of the loss, attempt to hear his voice and feel only the chill of silence,

attempt to picture the future without him and feel the awfulness of the blank, we shall sink, and the sorrow will prostrate and unman us. Or, suppose the cross is some grievous illness; then, if we dwell on the prospect of arrested purposes and thwarted capacities, of the possible overthrow of hopes and ambitions, once again we shall begin to sink. The only hope is, if we have faith at all, to have faith entirely; we must keep the eyes of thought and imagination fixed resolutely on the presence of Christ. We must lose the sight of the cross in the sight of the Crucified.

THE GADARENE DEMONIAC

St. Matt. viii. 28; St. Mark v. 1 ; St. Luke viii. 26

THE GADARENE DEMONIAC

St. Matt. viii. 28 ; St. Mark v. 1 ; St. Luke viii. 26

I. DISORDERED LIFE

The healing of the Gadarene demoniac is, from the point of view of the Christian apologist, one of the most perplexing of the miracles of Jesus. But that is not our point of view in these pages. Our business is not to explain the miracles, but to try to learn the lessons of life of which they were the signs. We must therefore decline to enter this arena of argument, strewn with the relics of many contests. We must waive all discussion as to the meaning of these "devils" and of Christ's treatment of their victims. How far Jesus in this, as manifestly He did

in other matters, accommodated Himself to the belief of the time, or to the illusions of the maniacs themselves—dealt with them on their own level, for their lasting good—we cannot tell. But it is hardly possible to doubt that the authority of Jesus is given to the belief that these cases of mania were due, not only to disordered tissues of the brain, but to some mysterious possession of evil spirits. The whole relationship of spirit to matter is so involved in mystery that any special mystery within it can scarcely disconcert. For our part, we must be content to take this Gadarene demoniac simply as a type of human life when it has lost its self-control and wanders disordered and confused, the mere prey of morbid passion or delusion.

The still air we breathe is charged with the elements of destruction: two slowly moving clouds will meet, and the languid morning becomes a day of disaster. Within the "mute earth we tread" lie concealed forces which sometimes, with scarce a warning,

will upheave its surface, and belch forth fire and brimstone. Our bodies we treat as the most docile of daily servants, on whose ready obedience we rely by instinct; but let an invisible germ enter them, and they are wild with fever and delirium. So it is with our minds and spirits. Each of us contains within himself just those elements of thought and feeling which produce the murderer, the suicide, the maniac. In our senses still lie hid the passions of the savage and the beast. We sometimes think with wonder of the power with which some single white man in the far outposts of the Empire keeps multitudes of wild barbarians in awe and order. But even more wonderful is that slender thread of sanity which keeps the latent forces of disorder within ourselves in peace. The slightest cause may suffice to break it. A few ounces of a drug will at once turn a reasonable man into a furious beast. Nay, think what fantastic maniacs many of us become nightly in our dreams!

Even so there are often elements in the

moral and intellectual atmosphere which we breathe which act like fever-germs, and involve us in bewilderment or melancholy. Such elements are thick in the atmosphere of our modern life. It is a time of intense self-consciousness, and a time also in which new ideas and sensations jostle and press around us. These are conditions which make it very hard to keep a perfect sanity of soul. You may find a striking instance in the "Journal of Amiel"—a book in which you can trace the descent to disorder and melancholy of a mind intensely self-conscious, and brooding over the bewilderments of modern thought and feeling. It is doubtless an extreme instance, but there are few men who are not conscious sometimes of movements within them—movements of mind or of sensation—which, if they were not held in check, would throw them off their balance: they are like the low rumblings of the earth which betoken the possibility of an earthquake. No one who watches himself or knows anything of the secret thoughts of his fellow-men; no one

who discerns the signs of the times in the mass of morbid literature, in the fever of pleasure-seeking, in the rise and fall of curious and fantastic theories of life and conduct—spiritualism, "Christian Science" and the like—in the prevalence of religions of excitement, can doubt that the atmosphere around us is thickly charged with elements of disorder. Who shall say that these tendencies of the time may not be the influence of evil spirits? We talk of the "spirit of the age." Is it a mere metaphor? He would be a bold man who gave a ready answer, and not perhaps the wisest who would answer—yes. Thus it is that we, the men of the nineteenth century in Europe, have some kinship with that poor demoniac of Gadara. And the same Healer is at hand to save.

II. JESUS AND LEGION

Some kinship between ourselves and the Gadarene demoniac — perhaps it may be

thought that this comparison was fanciful, indeed morbid. But there is a pathetic word of the demoniac which, when we think of it, shows that the comparison is by no means so fanciful or morbid as we might suppose. Jesus asked him, "What is thy name? and he saith unto Him, my name is Legion, for we are many." He knew not what he really was; only that he was tossed about and carried hither and thither by a crowd of wild and disordered impulses. Well, let us ask ourselves the same question. What is thy name? What art thou in thyself—what is thy real, permanent, personal character? Do we not hesitate to answer? What am I? Nay, I know not: I am so complex; half one thing half another; one being at one time, another at another; my name is Legion, for we are many.

It is this complexity of life which is, perhaps, the special trial of the times we live in. In olden days, life was surely an altogether simpler business. Men lived and moved and thought in grooves, which had

been moulded by the customs of generations. Doubtless there were always the primary struggles—of honour and selfishness, of duty and pleasure, of doubt and faith, of love and lust. But they were waged, we think, on a simpler scale and for a clearer issue. Now, however, in all this tumult of book-writing and discussing, in the thick dust of criticism, the struggle seems to have become a disordered *mêlée*, in which it is often hard to distinguish friends and foes. In literature, in art, in life, we tend to abandon the quest of principles and are content with impressions: and are satisfied if we can balance occasional sensations which we feel to be wrong with occasional sensations which we feel to be right. Complexity—that is the

> Strange disease of modern life,
> With its sick hurry, its divided aims,
> Its head o'ertaxed, its palsied heart.

Most men, in truth, never seem to ask what they are—what they are really trying to be. And even those of us who cherish ideals are

conscious of contrary impulses which attract and claim and hold us; so that we are in doubt sometimes whether we are one man or many. "What is thy name?" We stumble at the answer, and can only say, "It is Legion."

What we need, then, is to simplify life. We must clear a path through the jungle. We must resolutely choose what impulse we mean to follow. After all, we have to make out a life, one which will "win us an honourable discharge." It is a task impossible to the half-hearted. The will lives or moves only when it has a set purpose before it; it frets itself to death in the jostle of divided aims. We must cut through the entanglements by a decisive act of choice. Life, if it is to be free, must be simple. The Legion-spirit must be banished.

But how are we to choose? The answer depends on the choice of an authority. It is this—an authority which constrains our loyalty—that we are all really seeking. Mr. Dowden has said of our modern literature:

"It is distinguished by its eager and anxious search for spiritual truth; by its restlessness in the presence of spiritual anarchy; by its desire for some spiritual order." And literature is but the expression of life. Our life cries out for an authority. We are tempted sometimes to yield to the authority of some fascinating system; but in fact a mere system only cramps. It destroys, it does not rescue, personality. Instinctively we know that the only authority which can at once order and inspire personality is personal. The authority we need is some "still strong man."

Legion in ancient Gadara felt the spell of such an authority in the presence of Jesus. And Legion in modern England is still confronted by Him. There He stands, still challenging the world's attention. Legion in us, as in the demoniac, feels the power of His presence. There is no question of the authority of His tone. We cannot even speak of Him as revealing impressions or expressing opinions. He states convictions,

states them with the simplicity of an assured possession of the truth. In His lips they have all the freshness and the force of a divine intuition. Among all the words that have been spoken by the guides of men none have been spoken with such calm authority, and none have been vindicated by such a history of power as these: "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, and ye shall find rest unto your souls." Here, surely is the "still, strong Man" of my soul's need.

> Languor is not in His heart,
> Weakness is not in His word,
> Weariness not on His brow.

For the making of life I must needs choose an authority. I choose His; and I find that, by yielding to His mastery, my life continually grows in self-control and sure ness; it gains simplicity, strength, freedom. He drives out the Legion and restores me to the right mind. Legion is gone, when to

the question, "What is thy name?" I can answer, "Christian."

III. THE FEAR OF THE SUPERNATURAL

The people of the town "come to Jesus and behold him that was possessed with devils sitting clothed and in his right mind, even him that had the legion, and they were afraid." It was a fear very natural and very human. They had heard the tale, they saw the signs, of a display of power forcible and unquestionable. To prove with dramatic completeness that real powers of evil had possessed the man, and that another power had appeared which was their master, Jesus had driven the "devils" forth into the herd of swine. Here was one in the midst of these simple folk who held sway over the occult and mysterious powers which ever haunt the dim recesses of human nature. It is no wonder that they were filled with awe.

It would be well, indeed, if we had more of this spirit of fear. The record of man's life since Christ came is full of instances of a like supernatural transformation. We can see them multiplied in our streets and at our doors. The experience of Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus has been, is being, repeated in countless lives. For nineteen hundred years an unseen power has arrested men in their course of life, banished their disorders, and given them a new peace and strength, and they have known and testified that this power was Jesus of Nazareth. The great Napoleon, replying to the flatteries of his friends, once said, "I must be present to be powerful: but there is a Man who calmly looks over the centuries and claims the human heart, and, what is more, He gets it." Sometimes the claim confronts the rough wayfarer, overwhelms him with a force akin to his own passionate nature, rends him with agonies of remorse, and thrills him with a sense of freedom from his sins, and lo! the

drunkard, the sensualist, the blasphemer, emerges a new man, pledged to a heroic and resolute quest of sobriety, chastity, reverence. Sometimes the thinker, wearied with his long travel in pursuit of truth, sees a vision which inspires him to say, "I have found the ultimate secret; I have heard the Word of God." Sometimes a man who has lost the path of a simple satisfying standard of life, and feels that he is wandering in a maze, finds a Hand stretched out to him, which, when he grasps it, leads him on in the joy of security and progress. But the testimony of one and all is the same: it is, "Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord." When we think of it, there is nothing in the world so wonderful as the persistence and the unanimity of this witness. Either it means the mere pathetic recurrence of a beautiful delusion which somehow human nature refuses to abandon; or it means the awful fact that still a Supreme Personality is in our midst, wielding from the Unseen

an eternal sway over the hearts and consciences of men. If this be the truth, must not the thought fill us with awe? The very frequency of these spiritual transformations tends to put us at our ease; we talk lightly of "conversions" and "changes" as if they were ordinary occurrences. Rather should they make us tremble: it is an awful thing to be confronted with the manifest signs of a divine Presence in our midst.

But there is a false fear as well as a true. The men of Gadara were afraid; "and they beseech Him to depart from their borders." The presence of one whose power was so great would disturb their daily life: it would make them uncomfortable, uncertain as to what He would do with them. So is it still. Men do not care to face the awful thought of a divine power among them. It disturbs the easy routine of customary life. We grow so accustomed to our average, ordinary self that we shrink from losing it. We have settled down to our comfortable compromises. We treat our indulgences as we treat the

faults of a friend, as things we cannot imagine ourselves without. We are afraid to be transformed, afraid of the unknown consequences which might follow. So long as religion will quietly accommodate itself to the kind of life which we have got used to, so long as we can speak of it as a beautiful ideal, we are not afraid to have a religion. But religion, as the claim of a Person to the entire possession of our body, soul, and spirit, that He may do what He will with them—no, it is too urgent, too exacting, too disturbing; we beseech it to depart from our borders. It is this ignoble fear, taking refuge within the citadel of custom, that makes the Church so stagnant, so void of venture and of power in the world. It becomes, not the sphere of the transforming Spirit of Christ, but the home of compromise. It is good sometimes to think of that echo which may one day sound in response to our timorous voices: "Depart from me." The doom will be simply the final fulfilment of our own desire.

The true fear will rather issue in a true courage—the courage of submission. "I see and know Thy power, O thou Spirit of the Living Christ. Yet I will not shrink from it. Rather let me yield to it, and accept it as the master-force of all my living." Such courage is itself transformed: for it becomes the love in which fear is made perfect.

IV. HOME WITNESS

"As Jesus was entering into the boat, he that had been possessed with devils besought Him that he might be with Him." How easily we can realise his feelings! He had been resting in the peace and quiet which had so strangely and so suddenly come to his disordered life. He felt the protection of His presence, who had driven his tormentors forth. But now his rest was broken by the signs of Jesus' departure. The difficulties of the future came home to him. He would be a marked man, a centre of curiosity for the whole district. His intercourse with men

would be necessarily awkward; how would they treat one who had been so long a weird and horrid figure? Perhaps, when the spell of Jesus' presence was removed, the old trouble would come back, and the Legion would take possession of his soul again. We can imagine the passionate eagerness with which he would beseech Jesus that he might be with Him; protected there from the gaze of men and the fear of himself. But it was not to be. "Jesus suffered him not, but said unto him, 'Go to thy house unto thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and how He had mercy on thee.'" It was a hard command; but he obeyed it resolutely. "He went his way; and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him."

We can the more easily sympathise with his wish and admire his courage, because most men find that home is the most difficult place of witness. The very circumstances which give home its charm bring their own difficulties to religion. The ease and fami-

liarity of the home-atmosphere put us off our guard. The restraints which we place upon ourselves in our intercourse with the world outside are laid aside. We put them by, with our tools and working clothes. Elsewhere we have a reputation to keep; but at home the strain is loosened; we have no reputation to lose; it is our ordinary slackened self that it is quietly taken for granted. Our household faults are as familiar as our household furniture. The long associations of home-life, if they are in one respect endearing, are also in another aspect enfeebling. Habits of speech and conduct, ways of treating those who have been about us every day, have grown up and wound themselves round us by a thousand ties, so that we cannot shake them from us. We can make an effort to rise to our best before the outer world, or before God in our own secret prayers and thoughts; but in the home-life we sink back to our most ordinary anheroic level. We cannot utter the brave words we can speak to the crowd or the high

aspirations we can sometimes breathe to God, for we shrink from the silent comment of the companions of our home—made not uncharitably, almost unconsciously: "Well, all this is not exactly what we know him to be." To bring into the slackness of home-life the energy of a consistent effort of witness, to speak of things deep and sacred, where the whole atmosphere is ordinary and familiar, to brave the perpetual reminders of our own inconsistencies, this is often difficult indeed.

Yet it is for this very reason that Christ sets the home before us as the place of primary witness. The discipline of home-difficulty is good for ourselves. It acts as a touchstone of our sincerity. Our life in the world outside is more or less artificial; and the words that we speak, or the sermons that we preach, to the outside world, are apt to have this taint of artificiality. And, alas! it is easy to be artificial on our knees; to suppose that what we can be there is what we really are. But in the intercourse of home disguises and delusions are impossible;

it is bluntly real. It gives us not the delusive happiness of fiction, but the wholesome discipline of fact. If therefore we find that at home we are learning to be more Christ-like, more true to our own ideal, more considerate and unselfish, more able to speak our deepest thoughts frankly and simply, we can thank God that our own religion is becoming more real. There can be nothing artificial about it when it is woven into the familiar intimacies of home.

Moreover, it is just this which will give our religion its value as a witness to others. They will instinctively feel it to be real if they see it answering this difficult test. It is not the eloquence of our words, or the energy of our deeds, that commends our religion; it is the impression of its sincerity. Our evidence carries weight when it is recognised to be, not hearsay, but at first hand. If therefore the religion of Christ is to be advanced the need is not so much a vigorous Church-life—*that* may be tainted with unreal devotion, or mere interest in eccleiasticals

things: not so much a fervent philanthropy—*that* may be tainted with love of influence, or pride of energy: but a strong home religion,—for *that* has been tested by the surest discipline of reality. Church religion, national religion, are unstable unless they are based upon the solid foundation of home religion. "Go to thy house and to thy friends and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee."

THE NOBLEMAN OF CAPERNAUM

St. John iv. 46

THE NOBLEMAN OF CAPERNAUM

St. John iv. 46

I. THE SIFTING OF CHARACTER

"NOTHING more can be done." How often have these words, spoken sadly and deliberately by the physician, baffled after long struggle, quenched the last faint sparks of anxious hope! They had doubtless been spoken in the home of the nobleman at Capernaum. His son was now at the point of death. But there was one last chance. Report came that Jesus the Prophet was returning from Judæa. He was already well known at Capernaum, and returning pilgrims would bring tales of the signs and wonders of healing with which

He had been arresting the notice of Jerusalem. Here was a new hope. The father would go to Him, and appeal for His help. No time was to be lost: he hurried out to meet the Prophet on His way. He besought Him—with what urgency we can so well imagine—that He would come down and heal his son The answer of Jesus was strange and perplexing. "Except ye see signs and wonders ye will not believe."

It may be that Jesus felt deeply the contrast between the ready and eager heed paid to His acts and the indifference and denseness that refused the appeal of His words. How little there was in all the excitement of men about Him of any recognition that the Son of God was in their midst with His gift of a new life for the soul! It may be that Jesus wished to test the man himself, to see whether he had any personal faith, or only an anxiety to make use of Him as a last resource; to probe, in fact, the motives that had brought him there. This was often Jesus' way. He sifted men before He

answered them ; you remember His treatment of the Syro-Phœnician woman and the rich young ruler. It was the man himself He sought for—not his admiration, his gratitude, but himself—the allegiance of his own inward character. This was the meaning of that reserve of Jesus which sometimes seems so strange—He withheld the gifts of His love and kindness till He was sure of a reality of faith to welcome them. In this instance the test was not in vain. It revealed something more in the nobleman than a mere eagerness to seize any last chance for his boy's recovery. Had that been all, the rebuff might have disconcerted him. But it only called out the persistence of a true faith. There was a note of simple confidence in the character of Jesus in the reply—so pathetically earnest in its very quietness—"Sir, come down ere my child die."

You will notice, too, there was no sign or wonder given. "Jesus saith unto him, 'Go thy way: thy son liveth.'" There was no hasting forth, no solemn arrival, no authori-

tative word; only that simple statement—"Thy son liveth." It was another and a more searching test. For it was no answer to the plea, "Come down." "Thy son liveth!"—and the father had left him stretched helpless, abandoned by hope, at the point of death; and the Prophet would not come to save him! How hard to turn away! Along that road he had hasted with the one hope spurring him on—"I must meet Jesus and bring Him to my child." Could he turn back again, with the vision of the dying boy before him, and the one hope left behind? But his faith was once more equal to the test: it was strong enough to trust the mere word. "The man believed the word that Jesus spake unto him, and he went his way." There must have been long hours of weary travelling and the anguish of anxiety, as the miles lengthened between him and the Healer who would not come with him. But we know the news that reached him on the road. "His servants met him saying that his son lived."

It is not surely hard for some of us to read

in that story a parable of our own life—the earnest wish, brought to our Lord and laid at His feet in prayer, His answers, as it seems, of rebuke or hard testing, the long days and years of the travelling with uncertainty and anxiety as the only companions—in short, the painful discipline of faith. But somewhere along that far-reaching stretch of the road of life, it may be on the other side of the river of death, the good news is waiting for us which will show that the mere word of Jesus was worth trusting.

II. THE CRAVING FOR SIGNS AND WONDERS

Let us think for a moment about that sifting rebuke, "Except ye see signs and wonders ye will not—ye will in no wise—believe." Jesus seems to have had in view the readiness of men to acknowledge a divine Presence in their midst by the evidence of outward displays of power, and their slowness

to acknowledge it by the evidence of its appeal to their moral and spiritual nature. He was trying to make the nobleman of Capernaum discern the real basis of his faith —whether it was Jesus Himself or only the wonders which He wrought. This craving for signs and wonders as the proof of the reality of a divine Presence seems to be natural to the human mind. It trusts its bodily senses rather than its spiritual instincts. The vulgar are convinced only by the obvious. Living as they do in the world of the senses, it is only signs and wonders that can make them believe. Similarly, to the man who lives in the world of mere intellect only what can be demonstrated appeals. But the divine, the infinite, transcends alike the senses and the intellect; it can be apprehended only by the spirit. Its supreme evidence is after all moral and spiritual. It is only the man in whom these elements are strong and active that can discern it. If in viewing the world at large we wait for a proof of the divine Presence till we have seen some awe-striking portent,

some direct break in the custom of things, or till our intellect has met with some irresistible demonstration, we shall probably never find it. Sometimes, indeed, history tells of events whose suddenness and decisiveness seem to prove the direct intervention of a supreme God. Sometimes arguments for His existence may seem unanswerable. But that is not God's normal way of manifesting Himself. We are to see His Presence rather in the region of the spirit. Thus, surely the great proof is just the persistence throughout the long story of the world, of the spiritual, the ideal, in man. Consider the strength of the temptation to ignore it, and the weakness of any obvious reason to keep it. The flesh is strong, urgent, positive; yet the conscience of man still brands its indulgence with shame. Job's problem of the unequal lot of the righteous and the sinner in the world remains unsolved: the wicked still flourishes as a green bay-tree; yet the craving for goodness remains, and there is no happiness when it remains unsatisfied. No voice has ever

reached man from beyond the grave: death has seemed for centuries a plain and final end yet man holds to the conviction that it is *not*. The growth of civilisation steadily increases the resources of this life and elaborates its possibilities; but still the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing; civilisation leaves still the conviction that here we have no continuing city. We are still travellers: we seek a city to come. The one life that never succeeds, as the world counts success, is the life of spiritual effort; yet there is that in us which persists in declaring that it is the only life worth living. How is it that mankind has not surrendered to the world? How is it that the spirit has not long since abandoned its seemingly endless struggle? How are we to explain, in short, this persistence of the ideal, the spiritual? It cannot be that mankind, when it knows itself to be at its best, is the victim of a delusion. It must be that in its midst is the Spirit of God, inspiring, encouraging, sustaining the spirit of man.

So, too, in the story of my own life. I am ever on the search for signs and wonders to buttress my failing faith. But I do not find them. I have seen no overwhelming vision. I can point perhaps to no marvellous answer to prayer—otherwise inexplicable. I have found no demonstration to which my intellect cannot find a possible reply. But—I am still struggling against my temptations: there is no hope which I hold more strongly than that I may be found still struggling to the end. I still find myself praying, and knowing that my outpouring of the soul's secret to an unseen heaven lifts, strengthens, quiets me. I know all that argument can say against my faith; but I know that no argument can bind it. In moments when I can escape the distractions of daily life and the pressure of the senses, I am still conscious of a yearning which is at once unsatisfied and sure of its rightness—for it is the instinct of a divine fellowship. I still know that there is no power on earth that can so lay hold of my best self, and satisfy and stimulate it, as the

thought of One who long ago walked this earth and spoke the words of eternal life and died for love of me His brother. That is the evidence of my faith : it is enough. Not the signs and wonders, not the wind rending the mountains, not the earthquake and the fire ; but the still small voice in a man's own soul is the witness of the Presence of God.

III. DISAPPOINTMENTS IN RELIGION

The nobleman of Capernaum had made up his mind to go to Jesus. As he went, he would stay the anxious thoughts which hovered round the dying child with reminders of the kindness and the power of the Prophet. He believed in both ; he was sure that if Jesus heard the father's plea He would answer it. So he came ; and asked in faith. How chilling, how perplexing, that reply—as it seemed, a mere rebuff! We reminded ourselves of two similar cases. The Syro-Phœnician woman came to Him

in all the faith of a mother's love, and He seemed to repel her with taunts. The rich young ruler, in all the ardour of desire to learn the teacher's lesson, cast himself at His feet, and in words of love and respect—"Good Master"—asked his question. And again the first answer was a rebuke; and the last answer the summons to a sacrifice too hard to make.

Well, it may have been just thus in our religious experience. We gave up our carelessness and offered our lives to God; and we have been troubled with perplexing doubts which never troubled us before. We told Him that our one desire was to be better men; and He seemed to answer us by letting us see as we had never seen before how bad we were. We offered ourselves to do some work for Him, and we found that we could not do it: it failed; we could do nothing with it. We resolved for His sake to make a bold stand for what we believed to be His cause; and we only hindered it. We made up our minds to

speak some word to another for his good; and our word was misunderstood: it exasperated, it broke confidence, and with confidence the power of future influence. We offered Him our love, and we have had long spells of dryness, hardness, depression of spirit.

Now, sometimes the reason may be some "root of bitterness" in ourselves, some sin not faced and dealt with, some habit still permitted, some sacrifice still grudged. But it is not always so. Sometimes—very often—these seeming rebuffs, these very real disappointments, are sent by God for our good. They are to test the inner motive of our faith, our prayers, our efforts. They are to show us whether in some subtle way we are not self-seeking—expecting our own happiness or satisfaction, rather than "God's glory." Is my idea of religion happy feelings rather than strenuous service? Is my desire in work its success or His will? In short, is my motto really "For His sake," or only, after all, "For my sake"? Our God

is a jealous God. He cannot permit a divided allegiance: He asks us to serve Him for His own glory, for what we can give Him, not what He can give us. And when we think of it, that is a sign, not that He is a hard taskmaster, but that He is a God of love. He Himself is the altogether Good, the supreme satisfaction of the soul. He knows that nothing short of Himself—His own glory—can really satisfy us; that to seek to please Him and serve Him in everything is the best and happiest thing in the world. So by these rebuffs, and testing disappointments, He warns us off false lines of religion. He pulls us up when He sees, as we cannot, that we are setting out on mistaken ways. He brings us back to the starting-point of the true road, and will not let us move away from it in delusive ease till we have finally set our steps the right way. He checks and disappoints until we have learned to say for ourselves, "Man's chief end is to glorify God." Thus only can we "enjoy Him for ever."

IV. THE PERPLEXITIES OF PRAYER

We may be sure that if ever a prayer was sincere and from the heart it was that prayer of the nobleman, that Jesus would come down and heal his son. Yet at first there was no answer at all. He repeated it in words of simple entreaty; and then the answer was quite different from what he had asked. He asked Jesus to come; he was told to go his way. "Sir, come down ere my child die. Jesus saith unto him. Go thy way; thy son liveth." But, as he went, he found that that unexpected answer was really more wonderful, more satisfying than the one for which he had prayed.

I suppose there are few things in the religious life so disquieting as the perplexities of prayer. We make our prayer, earnestly, deliberately; we are sure that what we ask is not plainly against God's will. Sometimes there seems to be no answer at all. We pray and pray, and the heavens seem to be as

brass. Sometimes, if circumstances that occur be the answer, they are strangely different from what we asked or expected. I found the other day the record of a prayer offered solemnly at a supreme moment of life after much thought; a prayer asking for power to do a special act of service. The only answer so far seems to be circumstances which make that service quite impossible. "The one thing I have earnestly prayed for," said a clergyman, a man every inch of him, "is to have influence over working men; they are the one class I seem unable to touch." "Few people," said a true saint of God, "have had more reason to thank God for answers to prayer. Well, the one great difficulty of my life has come; I have prayed about it hard; and the Lord's silence is almost breaking my heart." A great gift of love came to the life of a man devoted to the service of his brother-men. He prayed that it might be used to quicken his zeal and drive out the sense of loneliness in his work. It came; it was immediately

taken away; and his loneliness was all the greater.

What are we to say? Very often nothing; we can only bow the head, and be silent and wait. Yet there are two thoughts that sometimes help. One is, that often after long years the answer comes, or else we discover that it really came—came in a truer way than our own wish had conceived—in the answer that we thought so baffling. It was after many hours upon the road that his servants met the ruler of Capernaum; and they told him that Jesus' answer had really been the boy's life. One of the great surprises, when all the story of our life stands clear before us in the light of the eternal world, will be the discovery of the wonderful and unexpected ways in which our prayers were answered.

It is good sometimes to think of the light of that discovery when darkness for the time surrounds us. "In His light shall we see light."

The other thought is that through these

perplexities we may learn the real secret of prayer. We are to pray as men that expect an answer; but we are not to pray for the sake of the answer. The essence of prayer, so to say, is the act, not the answer. It is the communion of the child with the Father. It is the placing of the life—its thoughts and wants and hopes—on the divine will and leaving it there. If no answer seems to come, it is often just to test the reality of our trust in that will of God. When we think that the answer is the end of prayer, we set our mind on *that*, and disturb and distract our life in the impatient expectation of it. When we think that prayer is its own end, we leave the answer to Him; and this trustfulness brings a great calm; and this calm, this sense that all is in God's hands, is the real power that prayer gives to life. The man of the world has his easy sneer—"You pray, and if you get what you wish, you call it an answer to your prayer; if you don't, you say it does not matter. Where, then, is the good of prayer?" But the foolishness of the world

is the wisdom of God. When we are perplexed, let these great words of St. John fall upon our ears with their calm strength: "This is the boldness that we have towards Him, that if we ask anything according to His will He heareth us, and if we know that He heareth us whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions which we have asked of Him." That is the secret—"we know He heareth us."

V. A RULE OF LIFE

"The man believed the word that Jesus spake unto him, and he went his way." These words of the Evangelist—simple as the trust and obedience of the nobleman—are not less deep than simple; for in truth, if we ponder them, we shall find them to reveal nothing less than the secret of a sane and happy Christian life. We have been thinking of some of the distresses and disappointments of religion. Well, here is a key put into our

hands which can unlock the gate of escape from them. It is—to take Jesus at his word and at once to act as if it were true; to believe the word that Jesus speaks unto us and go our way.

We have the record of the words of Jesus. The progress of criticism has really strengthened the grounds for accepting the Gospels as authentic. But even suppose a man feels bound to admit that some of the words of Jesus have been, in the manner of Eastern writers, put into His mouth by His disciples in the later years of memory and reflection, yet he can hold to others which Jesus, and Jesus only, can have spoken. They are, in themselves, in the effect they have had on the world's history, the greatest words ever spoken in this planet. They have, in a unique degree, the characteristic of all the great words which have made epochs in the story of man's life—the mark of personality. They come to us straight from His lips — no other account of them is possible. And what words they are! So

simple, yet so profound, so majestic in their quiet confidence, in their air of supreme authority. They are living words; the freshness of eternal truth is ever in them; they *find* men still, find them in their deepest need, in their truest instincts. If anywhere there is what the old philosopher longed for, a sure divine word, it is here. The truest wisdom—a wisdom which is ever justified by its results—is to take one's stand by them, to hold them as true.

Yet this is just what Christians are often slow to do. They assent to them, but they do not trust them as true. Take the simplest instance. Jesus revealed the Supreme Being as "Father." That word alone, if taken really as true, is enough to transform life. Yet, when any event occurs to strain their faith in it, men lose it. They will not resolutely hold that the inevitable will of God, when it pains them, is the will of a Father. Or, they cannot resist the appeal of Jesus: *His* love and goodness come home to them; but they will not take His word as

true that this is simply the love and goodness of the Most High God. It is quite surprising to find how many Christians seem really to think that there is in God something different from the love of Jesus. Again and again one discovers in oneself and in others that the real source of religious distresses and disappointments is nothing but a distrust of the plain word of Jesus.

We think it is something much more subtle—snall I say more interesting?—but it is *that*. If we are to believe at all, we had better believe simply and thoroughly. It seems an obvious thing to say; but the secret of success and of failure in the religious life is in it. The root of the matter is to take Jesus at His word.

And then—to go our way. We have taken our stand: we know where we are about the problems of life; we believe the word that Jesus has spoken to us. Then we are, with all simplicity and directness, to shape our daily steps accordingly. We are to take everything that comes — of

opportunity, of trial, of sorrow, of happiness —as covered by that first and fundamental truth: and to go our way in trust. This is the whole art of Christian living. Let us try to practise it.

THE STORY OF BLIND BARTIMÆUS

St. Mark x. 46

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I. THE CONDUCT OF THE CROWD

THERE was unwonted excitement at Jericho. The time of the great feast was drawing near, and the city was full of people on their way to Jerusalem, in all the mingled fervour and bustle of a religious holiday. But the centre of excitement was the great Prophet of Galilee. He, too, was on His way to Jerusalem, and He had been sojourning at Jericho. The tale of His words and works had gone before Him. Memories of the prophets of old had been stirred up by it, and begar to surround Him, so that many

looked upon Him as the long-promised Son of David, advancing to claim His kingdom. There was a stir of romantic expectation; and when He set forth on His road to Jerusalem an eager crowd surrounded Him. The sound of their advancing footsteps reached the ear of a blind beggar, waiting by the wayside. He, too, had heard the gossip of the town, and the tale of the Prophet's wonders. He had set himself by the wayside to wait His coming and to claim His mercy, for surely the Son of David would have pity for the blind. And now he heard that Jesus was passing by him. His chance had come: and in a few moments the echo of vanishing footsteps might sound the death-knell of his hope. How easily we can imagine the tumult of hope and fear behind the dull, blank eyes, and the clamorous urgency of his voice! "He kept on crying out, Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me!" But such a spectacle of wayside misery was an intrusion on the new excitement of the crowd. With that

strange instinct of possession which fills a multitude, they claimed the Hero for themselves. The only answers that reached the blind man from the swiftly passing movement were the voices of churlish rebuke, that he should hold his peace. But they only quickened his hope with the urgency of despair. "He cried out the more a great deal." Then—a sudden pause in the hurrying footsteps—a change in the voices—a word, "Be of good cheer, arise, He calleth thee." The long tension was over. The moment had come—to be seized or for ever lost. He sprang forward, casting his cloak behind him, and, with an instinct of faith as sure as sight, he came to Jesus. Who of us would not be blind if we could hear, with the blind man's intensified sense of hearing, the voice of Jesus? How that voice, which had laid its invisible spell on the tumults of madness and of the stormy sea, must have stilled the fever of his soul! "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?" "Go thy way, thy faith hath made thee whole!"

How wonderful that a man's first sight should have been the face of Jesus!

The story is past in time, but it is eternal in truth. Bartimæus is the soul of Humanity struggling for the light. Jesus of Nazareth is the Light of the World—the shining forth of God, who is Light, and in whom is no darkness at all.

Before we touch on these deep truths, let us first mark the conduct of the crowd. It is typical of the spirit of the world. The world resents religious earnestness, the importunity of the man who will not be satisfied with words or make-believes, but presses for the real, for the light. The world resents such straining after truth as an intrusion upon its comfort, a reminder of awkward questions which it is ever nervously anxious to stifle, or at least postpone. Conscience cannot be destroyed: if it is slain, it haunts. It baffles all writs of eviction. And the man in earnest is just this haunting spirit of conscience in bodily shape. He is Herod's John the Baptist risen from the dead.

There is no surer proof of the failure of the worldly life to give peace than its resentment and discomfort at the appearance of religious earnestness. And for ourselves, there is no surer test of the presence of the worldly spirit than the desire to rebuke men whose earnestness is greater than our own. Do we feel ourselves constrained, uncomfortable, perhaps irritated, when some man, in the urgency of his spirit, presses us with searching questions, lays bare the hollowness of our conventional words, ruthlessly ignores our palliatives? Do we find ourselves fencing his thoroughness and directness, evading his appeals, checking his importunity, with arguments and objections which our better self discerns through our very irritation to be unworthy? Then we may be sure that we have not yet been honest with ourselves, have not yet settled once for all whether we are for God or for the world.

There is a subtler form of this inner unreality which needs a special word. It is spiritual jealousy. Let me illustrate from

an experience too frequent in many homes. The placid routine of a respectable and in its way religious family is broken by the sudden uprise in one of its members of an intense religious conviction. It may be what is called a "conversion," or the coming home in vivid reality of some truth hitherto rather accepted than realised, or a new anxiety of the conscience to be wholly right with God. What is the attitude of the other members? Is it a recognition that the Spirit of God has made His presence plain, that a new call from Him has reached the whole family? Is it not rather too often the mere sense of discomfort, the nervous desire to keep things placid as before, to get rid of the new spirit of earnestness by argument, expostulation, even sneers? The sins of religious people are always the worst; and, believe me, there are few deadlier than this spiritual jealousy, for is it not a patent instance of the "sin against the Holy Ghost"?

"Jesus stood still and said, Call *ye* him." So He rebuked the people of Jericho. Let

us lay to heart the lesson of that rebuke. When we meet with any one who is crying for the light, whose zeal to realise the truth is importunate, let us thank God that He thus breaks through the lethargy of routine religion, and shows Himself personally at work with the souls of men. Let us deepen our own earnestness, test our own thoroughness, renew our own simple surrender to His guidance; and then, hearing His words, "Call ye him," rejoice with our brother that God has honoured him by the call of which his eager quest of the light is the sure witness, and bring him with our own selves to Him who creates the sense of need in order that He may satisfy it. There is no greater honour given to men than to be able to stand beside some brother-man in whose soul God has aroused the craving for the light that He alone can give, and to say to him "Be of good cheer: rise, He calleth thee."

II. THE BLIND BEGGAR

Blind and begging Bartimæus is a type of humanity in need of light. The blind man lives and moves in a world of his own. He has been blind from his birth, and he becomes accustomed to it. He can succeed with a good spirit in making it a world still worth living in. He has the sense of life; he may enjoy, often with an added zest, the gifts of the other senses; he seems to experience delights of sound and smell and touch which are denied to the man who sees; and he often has a special quality—to those who watch pathetic, but to himself natural—of quiet cheerfulness. Yet, for all that, his life is clouded by a sense of loss and a haunting uncertainty. The want of sight deprives him of the fulness of life and the freedom of independence.

So is man—so is my manhood—apart from that sight through which the Light of Life illuminates the soul. The familiar

outer world and the life lived within it are indeed real and pleasant enough. The sun sets in a glory of colour. The sea breaks upon the shore and the burn sings among the stones. The air is fresh with the breath of spring or fragrant with the breath of summer. The lark fills the atmosphere with joy. There is the kindly light of a friend's eye and the grip of his hand. There is the zest of honest work; and the rest, when it is done, is sweet. But the spirit of man is apart from these experiences of life. They cannot take possession of it, and they cannot satisfy its own fears and hopes and longings. It presses ever for something which they cannot give—for "the light that never was on sea or land." It feels after the Great Spirit, of whom and through whom and in whom are all things. And here it comes to know its blindness. It has no sure sight of the Great Being Himself; and so all its world is full of a haunting uncertainty. Apart from the world it is: apart from Him it cannot be. Yet He is a God that hideth Himself. What is His innermost

mind and character? Sometimes, indeed, the thought of Him provokes not trouble but mere thankfulness; as when that child of Nature, R. L. Stevenson, cheered his lonely way "by a colonnade of beeches along the brawling Allan" with the "triumphal chaunt, . . . 'Thank God for the grass and the fir-trees, and the cows and the sheep, and the sunshine and the shadows of the fir-trees!'" But there is the awful "other side." When we walk not "by colonnades of beeches by the brawling Allan," but by lines of squalid houses in a city street, with far other brawling in the ears; or watch the hope of life crushed by lingering suffering; or hear of thousands slain by earthquake or famine, then the "triumphal chaunt" seems a mockery: and it becomes a mere "crying in the night." What is He? Does He care?

Or, when the spirit thinks about *itself*, there comes the same sense of blindness—the same longing for the light. There is indeed the simple instinct of life; the joy in it; the capacity of feeling, thinking, being kind, and

knowing kindness. But there is, apart from all, the inner story—of my shame, my doubts, my aspirations. I cannot understand its drift: I tell it to no one: does no one know it? What is its real meaning: what is to be its ending? I feel two great darknesses—of my origin and of my destiny—closing in upon me. I feel that I am blind. And the sense of this want of a clear sight of the why and whence and what and whither of myself haunts and disturbs my life.

And the blind man is a beggar. In so far as he is blind he is not master of himself: he is dependent. His steps are uncertain: there comes a point when he is helpless, and depends upon the guidance or the pity of others. And my spiritual blindness beggars me. The uncertainty it brings robs my life of sureness and confidence. No man can be truly master of himself and master of his destiny until he has some clear sight of the final truth of things. He cannot know himself, know the way he has to go, know how he is to keep to it, until he has reached

some satisfying conviction of the meaning of the universe and of his place within it; and without such knowledge there is no mastery of self or of life—no real independence. In the beaten wayside of everyday living the need is perhaps not felt; but when we stumble and fall, or when some blow comes from an unseen Power—a blow of which we can tell neither whence nor why—then we are baffled and helpless from our want of sight. At such times we feel our blindness most when it makes us depend upon the pity or the words of others. They are well meant, and we are willing enough for the time to feel the help of their kindness or their consolation, but we long to get beyond them—beyond the need of sympathy or the soothing sound of the old words of familiar religion—to some personal *sight*, which shall reveal to us the way in which we are to recover from our fall, or the way in which we are to take the blow that has struck us down. To see with our own eyes, and by that sight to rise and to trust—this is our

importunate desire. Oh that I might receive my sight!

It is then—when man is smitten with the sense of his blindness—when his cry is the cry of the blind beggar—that he may still hear a voice, speaking with the calm authority of perfect possession of the Light of Life, "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?"

III. THE SIGHT-GIVER

What is the kind of sight for which our spirit cries? Plainly it must be a sight possible to human eyes. It is our human spirit that needs illumination. There is the light by which, it may be, angels see the purposes of God; there is the awful light in which God Himself beholds all things in time and in eternity. Not by such lights as these could sight come to human eyes. They would dazzle, bewilder, blind with the fulness of light. Yet the sight we ask must be one that sees truth itself, not any mere semblance

of truth; reality, not mere appearance. Nothing less can satisfy. The light must come straight from the truth, else we shall still be blind; we shall still see only illusions. It must therefore at once enable human eyes to see, and yet be itself lit by the full truth of God. The first need forbids us to ask for a sight which can see the whole mystery of the universe unravelled and plain as God sees it. Yet the second need forbids us to ask for a sight which shall see something short of absolute truth. Is it not plain therefore that we seek a light which, though it does not illumine every mystery, yet is God's own light so far as human eyes can endure it—a light "sufficient for us in the dark to rise by"?

Such is the light which Jesus gives. He is the light *of the world;* His gift is the light *of life.* He was Man, speaking, living as Man, conditioned like us by space and time, condescending to the limitations of our finite life. He knew what man needed, what man could endure. So there are many mysteries which He did not explain. We could not

bear them now—so He said; for the light which is to make *them* clear we must wait; it will come hereafter. But He was God, "Light of Light, very God of very God." He was the Word, the "express image" of the Father, the divine light revealed so far as human eye could see it. Nothing intervened between Him and God; the light He revealed came straight from God. Much He left unsaid; but what He did say was God's own truth. Much He left in darkness; but what He did reveal was God's own light. Neither more nor less than this He knew could help us. His light is sufficient. It enables us to see the truth of God where human eyes *can* see it, and to trust where they cannot.

In His light, then, we *see* the truth about the great Spirit of the universe. He is revealed by Jesus as the God of Love—"Our Father." There are heights and depths in the divine nature which our human eyes cannot discern and could not understand; but there is nothing higher or deeper than His Love. No discovery of other elements

in His infinite being can ever disclose Him as other than "Our Father." Nothing—not His Power, not His Holiness, not His Justice—can be apart from His Love. Nothing can happen, except sin, in which His Love is not, and for sin repented of His Love has a forgiveness as infinite as itself. Through all the mysteries of suffering, and sin, and death we can follow the Beam of Light which lit upon the world in the Life and the Cross of Jesus, to the truth of the divine love beyond them. In the joy of human love, of the sunshine, and the sea, and the streams, and the birds, we can rejoice in it; but in the sadness and sorrow of things we can trust it. We can endure as still seeing the love which in them may be invisible. But blindness—the sense of an utter darkness and the haunting fear that comes with it—blindness is gone. We have received our sight. And with sight we receive the mastery of life. Once convinced that God is Love, a man can go straight ahead upon his way. He is master of his falls, for he knows that he can rise. He is

master even of the blows that seem to strike him, for they cannot overthrow him. He bows his head in submission; but his spirit rises as he says, "I believe in the Love of God."

In the light of Jesus we *see* also the truth about ourselves. He gives me eyes to see the meaning of the story of my inward life. I know its purpose, that I should become like Him. His example is God's will for me. If I live for self, for the indulgence of my flesh, if I am gloomy, irritable, uncharitable, conceited, resentful, discontented, I *know* that I am wrong, that I am wandering from the sure way of life. If I try to become more unselfish, to live for the things of the spirit, not for the things of the flesh; to trust more absolutely in everything to the fact of God's Love; to let that trust issue in buoyancy, cheerfulness, readiness to forgive; to be humble about myself and full of charity to others; to be willing to sacrifice myself for the service of my brother-man; to do everything with the motive of pleasing God as the best and happiest thing in the world, then I *know* that I am right, that I

am keeping to the sure way of life. "He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life."

IV. THE GIFT OF SIGHT

Bartimæus felt his need of sight. He believed that Jesus of Nazareth could give it to him. But he must claim the gift in the urgency of his need by the venture of his faith. Without this faith the gift cannot be given. He made the venture. He believed the testimony that Jesus *could* open the eyes of the blind; that He was passing by, nay, that He was Himself calling for him. He sprang up and came to Jesus. And with the words, "Thy faith hath made thee whole," he received his sight.

We, realising our blindness to the eternal truths of God and of human life, feel our need of sight. No man who thinks earnestly can doubt that in the revelation of Jesus there is indeed the light, could it only reach him,

which would lighten his eyes. But how is the light of Jesus to reach the eyes of the blind? It is the old answer—by faith. The faith that brings the light has in it three parts—three movements of the soul. They are: the eager desire for sight; the belief that Jesus can give it, and that He is present to give; and the actual coming to Him to claim.

(1) We must long to see—to see with our own eyes—the light that shows God and life to us. We must have a deep dissatisfaction with any sort of blindness. We must refuse to go on living a life which, even if in many ways it is worth living, may be an illusion, because just this sight of ultimate truth is wanting. And in none is this longing to see more needed, nay more absent, than in many of us professing Christians. Many of us only believe that we see. We have become accustomed to the words of the Christian revelation. We do not think of questioning them. They fall familiarly and consolingly upon our ears; and we mistake the hearing

of the ear for the seeing of the eye. When the course of life is straight and simple and familiar, this belief that we see may suffice. But very often, when some unexpected obstacle trips our feet and we fall, or when some sudden blow strikes us—the stroke of disgrace, the loss of wife or child, or friend, or fortune, we are bewildered and dismayed; we cannot see the Love of God, the discipline of the Cross. We find that we cannot realise the truths in which we always supposed that we believed. We cannot say: "This is dark, terribly dark; but I see the Love of God beyond it. This is hard, terribly hard; but I see the print of the Cross of Christ upon it. I believe utterly that God is Love: His will be done." We are merely and simply in the dark. We find out that after all we are blind. Well is it for us then, in quiet days, to test our faith; to suspect the false security of familiar words; to aim at a real personal sight of the truths which we accept. For thus only in the hour of trial can I be sure that "when I fall, I shall arise. When I

am in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me." Whether then we are, or as yet can only wish to be, "Christians," we must have this longing to see.

(2) There must be the belief that Jesus can, and is present to give the light we need. That He *can* give it—surely there can be no doubt of that. Let any man who really longs to see put before him the life, the death, the words of Jesus, think quietly of the light of serene trust, willing sacrifice, secure possession of all-sufficient truth, in which His personality is bathed; and he *must* say, "Here is the light I need." For the belief that He is present to give it, there is the testimony of the Christian Church. Thousands in every age, and not least in our own, can say as of a fact—no more doubtful to them than their own existence—"He is here. I know Him. In my heart of hearts He speaks to me—a voice personal and distinct, apart from the voice of my own spirit or the mere influence of friend or teacher; known and recognised among all

others as His." This experience—explain it as we please—is among the facts of the world. I accept that testimony and I say: "He *can* give me the light I seek; and they tell me that He is still passing by with the power to give it to me."

(3) Then I must arise and come to Him. There must be this final venture of faith to bring me to Him. So long as I doubt and question and speculate—"After all, can it be true? after all, I can still see many difficulties; after all, these people may be mistaken; after all, am I sure that my faith is enough for Him, when I know how timorous and feeble it is?"—so long I cannot come to Him. And yet—surer far than the reasonableness of my doubts—is the need of life, straight, strong, convinced. And such life is impossible without light on the true meaning of God and of my self; and my whole soul cries out: "Here, in this Man Christ Jesus, is the Light of Life for me." Then I will make the venture—go to Him out of all my doubts and difficulties in the prayer of a great

need, casting them behind me, as a man casts away his garment, and say, "Lord, I am blind and I long to see. Thou hast the light I need: let it shine into my darkness. Lord, that I might receive my sight!"

This is the voice of the faith that gives sight to the blind. If it is ours, sooner or later we find that it is answered. The response of Jesus is either realised in a moment's illumination, or in the gradual passing over the whole life of an ever-clearer light, as the dawn slowly and surely overcomes the night. In either case, the promise is fulfilled: "If thine eye be single"—single in the utter sincerity of its desire to see—"thy whole body shall be full of light."

THE RAISING OF LAZARUS

St. John xi. 1

THE RAISING OF LAZARUS

St. John xi. 1

I. GOD'S DELAYS

NATURE is the oldest of man's teachers; and her teaching seems never more wonderful or more welcome than in the coming of the spring. Over her face in the days of winter there has been spread the veil of death. Under it the flowers have withered and the trees have been stripped and the birds have ceased to sing among the branches. But we know that all the while the veil of death has only been covering and protecting the birth of a new and fuller life. In the days of spring we behold the Spirit of God, the Giver of Life, lifting it, and disclosing

everywhere—in the soft sheen of colour in the copse, in the shoots of delicate green piercing the black earth, in the flowers of yellow and blue sprinkling the woods—the first beauties of the new world to come; and the lark is singing its herald song. The great Easter Day tells us that the parable of Nature has been made plain by the resurrection of its Lord, and death revealed as the gateway to fuller and more glorious life. With such thoughts in our mind we turn to that scene at Bethany when Jesus stood surrounded by all the sad signs of death, at the entry of the grave, and as the Lord of Eternal Life bade His imprisoned friend come forth.

It is needless here to describe the story, for it has been told with matchless simplicity and fulness by the Evangelist himself. In the reveries of his old age the great truth emerged calm and luminous—"In Him was life"; and in the light of it all the details of the scene as he had once seen it stood out precise and clear. The tale is told with a directness and

simplicity which make it quite impossible to believe that it could have been the fancy or the allegory of a later age. If on any record in the world there is the stamp of an eye-witness, it is on this story of the raising of Lazarus. It is the revelation, through a deed in time, of a truth which is eternal—that death is not the end, but only an episode, of life.

Consider first that very perplexing record of the delay of Jesus with which the story opens. "Now Jesus loved Martha, and Mary, and Lazarus. When *therefore* He heard that he was sick, He abode at that time two days in the place where He was." St. John, knowing that every detail in the life of the Word made flesh must have had a deep meaning of its own, is wont to hint at that meaning by his use of the word "therefore." But surely never did any of his "therefores" connect two clauses in more apparent variance with one another. Jesus loved his friends. They felt they could rely upon that love. They knew that He was near. They sent Him in perfect trust the simple summons,

"Behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick." They were sure He would come. But just because He loved them, "*therefore* He abode two days in the place where He was." And in those two days His friend died. No wonder that both the sisters, when He came at last, uttered in perplexity the thought that must have been ever present to their minds during that strange delay. "Lord, if Thou hadst been here my brother had not died." Only afterwards did they discover that there was no neglect, but rather a purpose of love in the bewildering delay. It was that there might be a fuller manifestation of the glory of God.

How prone we are to forget the deep lesson of St. John's "therefore"! We trust the love of God so far as to offer Him the plea of our prayer, "Lord, he whom Thou lovest is sick." But when the message seems to be unheeded, and the "two days" pass, and not the Lord of Life but the messenger of death comes, our trust in the love of God falters or breaks. We commend to the love of God at

this time of war those whom we love; and yet, in spite of all, the news comes that a brave life, full of promise, has been lost, and all the world seems blank and void of love.

But here in this story we have the rebuke of our faithlessness. Jesus did love; He did receive the message; but He allowed physical laws to finish their work, and Lazarus died. Yet when Martha doubted, He answered, "Said I not unto thee, that if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?" It was after six days; but the glory of God was seen. This Jesus is God. In this act of His, He is the mystery of Providence made plain. His love is still as real for those whom we commit to Him as it was for Lazarus. He has a purpose of love for them as surely as for Lazarus. Six days, or sixty years, or Time itself may pass before we see it; but it is not lost to the eternal sight of God, to whom a thousand years are as one day. It is ever as truly present to Him as His purpose for the whole universe. That is the very meaning of our faith in His love and

His infinity. For the time natural laws may prevail, and our day of waiting may seem as fruitless and sad as the days before Jesus came seemed to Martha and Mary. But we are simply and resolutely to believe that, behind and in spite of all the perplexity of outward seeming, a higher law, "for the glory of God," is working, and will, in God's own way and time, achieve its end, and we shall see it. There are two tests of the reality of faith in the love of God: the one the instinct of prayer, the other the power of waiting. The second is the harder of the two; but its reward is sure. It is natural to feel deeply the blow of disappointment, natural to cry, "Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died"; but it is the supernatural power of faith to hear and trust the word of Jesus, "Said I not unto thee, that if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?" After many days, the sight will come; but the days must be lived in faith.

II. CHRIST'S VIEW OF DEATH

It is natural to shrink from the thought of death. The shrinking is due to the intimate union of spirit with body, the close ties with which the body binds us to this present actual and vivid world. The severance of the spirit from its constant companion, its vanishing alone into some unknown mode of being, is a prospect that must fill every thoughtful mind with awe. Under the stress of some great effort, as in the tense excitement of battle, or under the influence of utter callousness or dearth of imagination, or in the mere mental exhaustion of long illness, a man may face it with indifference; but when he takes time to think of it, there must be the sense of awe. And to watch another die—one, perhaps, whom we would sacrifice our own life to save—is always to feel the cold touch of the dread mysteries which surround us. Yet we can see that, if the spirit is conscious of its fellowship with God, if it

always realises that in God is life, that there is no worthy life apart from Him, that in Him is the very fulness of life, the sense of awe must lose all desolateness and misery. Death will be to such a spirit always unspeakably solemn, but it cannot be miserable. The anguish, therefore, the weeping and wailing that surround the death-bed, must be the signs of a failure of faith that in God is the fulness of life, or of a haunting fear that the dead may not have really committed themselves to God—in short, the tokens of that disturbance of the consciousness of life in God which is the inevitable result of sin. In the eyes of the sinless, death could not wear this garb of desolate mourning. It would be solemn, but not sad; it would be the passage of the soul to a fuller life in God.

Nothing is more striking in the story of the raising of Lazarus than the evidence it gives of Christ's view of death. His whole object is to turn the eyes of His friends from their human sense of its misery, to teach them to look at it in His light. At first He will

not use the dread word "death" at all "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God." "Our friend Lazarus is fallen asleep: I go that I may awake him out of sleep." Only when His disciples showed that they could not understand His meaning, He said plainly, "Lazarus is dead." To Martha, too, He would not speak of death. "Whosoever liveth and believeth on me shall never die." When He saw Mary and the Jews who were with her weeping, or rather "wailing," we are told in striking words that "He was indignant in spirit and was troubled." There was something in this outburst of desolation and misery that moved Him to a troubled indignation. And again, when He came to the tomb, and beheld the shuddering of His companions, He was "moved with indignation in Himself." He was indignant at these signs and tokens of the power of long centuries of sin. It was only sin—sin conscious or sinfulness inherited—that could thus disturb and overthrow man's sense that the true life is lived in God, and is therefore

eternal as God Himself. In His eyes, to whom the Father was life itself, who lived in undisturbed fellowship with Him, this wailing in the train of death seemed the measure of that loss of the divine communion which sin and its resultant clouding of faith had wrought in human nature. He had taken that nature upon Himself, so as to be touched with the feeling of all its infirmities, and the sense of its loss of the trust in God oppressed Him, for we are told that He "wept." He wept in the fulness of His sympathy for this poor, strayed, darkened humanity. At the grave, His view of death as it might be, and man's view of death as it had become, were presented in the clearest contrast. When He ordered that the stone should be taken away, Martha, in spite of quickened faith and renewed hope, faltered at the thought of the exposure of her beloved brother in all the hideousness of corruption. "Lord, by this time he stinketh; for he hath been dead four days. Jesus saith unto her, Said

I not unto thee, that if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?" Faithlessness could only see miserable corruption, the bitterness of the end faith would see the glory of God, the renewal of life.

The Christian must learn to see death with Christ's eyes. In the case of one who has lived in sin, and passes away with no sign of penitence or turning to God, death must indeed seem dreadful. Yet even then the wailing is useless; the time for that has passed; an earnest plea for the mercy of God must take its place. But at the death-bed of a child, or of one who has died in the faith of Christ, with sin confessed and forgiven, with a simple trust in the Fatherhood of God, there weeping and wailing ought to be banished. There must, indeed, be the simple human grief at the vanishing of the beloved from sight; there may, indeed, be the reaction when the long struggle of hope is over, and the old familiar ties of a common life are snapped. To all this there will be

the response of the divine compassion, for "Jesus wept." But any utter breakdown of the spirit, any sense of mere desolateness, any grief for the dead, any feeling that we are separated by some great gulf from them —these ought to be conquered. Certainly there is no place at the death of a child or a Christian for the conventional trappings and parade of mourning. These are the relics of paganism, and ought to be banished from the Christian Church. How often must our Lord have been "moved with indignation" at the sight of them! To dispense with them is surely a first duty of witness to the Christian faith. It was the most striking witness which the early Christians upheld before the heathen world—"burying their dead with tranquil words of peace and hope." The need of that witness is ever with us. By the calmness of our bearing, the chastening of our human sorrow, the shining of the light of faith through the human tears, the quiet brightness and simple praise with which we com

mend the bodies of the beloved dead to their resting-place, by the resoluteness with which we still keep them in our lives in the fellowship of prayer and household talk, we are to let men see that even in death we behold the glory of God.

III. CHRIST'S VIEW OF LIFE

Easter Day. It is the springtide of the spirit of man. Christendom is thrilled by a great thankfulness for the hope that has transformed the world. On this day the shadow of death was banished by the rising of the Light of Eternal Life. The best and truest life of men has always risen above the limits of the world—refused to be bound by the ties of sense, gone forth in quest of the eternal. But it has ever been checked by the haunting fear that in escaping from the boundaries of the present world it was only entering the sphere of illusions, that sooner or later the hand of death would

seize it, and prove the vanity of its enterprise. Easter Day tells us that death is the great illusion, that the spirit-life which ever sought to escape it is the great reality. It proves that the true life is eternal. That life, manifested perfectly in Jesus, could not be holden by death, but snapped its chains and came forth triumphant. Easter Day saw the revelation in one final act of the truth which Jesus spoke at the grave of Lazarus, "I am the Resurrection and the Life."

Every step in the working of the miracle had been moving towards the revelation of Himself—His personal life—as the power which prevails over death. The sickness was ordained that "the Son of God may be glorified thereby." "I go that I may awake him out of sleep." When Martha spoke of the resurrection at the last day, thinking of it as some dim and distant gathering of the shades of the departed, the response of Jesus bade her see in Himself—in His actual living personality—the power of the resurrection. "*I* am the resurrection and the life: he that

believeth in me, though he were dead yet shall he live, and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die."

"I am the life." There are many modes of life in the nature of man, and we cannot tell how one mode is related to, or passes into, the other. There is the lower animal life; there is the life of the senses; there is the life of the imagination, the memory, the reason; and there is the life of the spirit, by which man apprehends, and is capable of intercourse with, the life of God. As life ascends from the lowest to the highest mode, so in this highest mode is found the completion of all the others. Each mode is meant, as it were, to make the most of itself, and to hand over its achievement to the mode above it. The animal nature is to minister to the senses. The senses are to give their sensations to the imagination for enriching, to the memory for storing, to the reason for ordering Reason, memory, imagination are to deliver all their wealth to the spirit, and the spirit is to bring it to God, to be seen in His lights

used in His service, offered in His praise. The true life is that of the spirit, realising all the meaning of the other modes of life in communion with God. This is the divine order. Sin has marred and perverted it. The course of life has been diverted downwards, and the spirit dragged into the bondage of the flesh. But this true life, "after the image of God," has once again been manifested in Jesus. In Him as Man we behold the spirit-life, the life in God, revealed in the utmost perfection possible within the limits of human nature. Body, soul, and spirit are in His perfect manhood united to God.

He not only reveals the true life, He gives it. It was not *a* man but manhood, human nature itself, that He thus "took into God." He is in man by His spirit, as the Giver of Life. The perfect life which He lived in the flesh nineteen centuries ago He still lives in the spirit in the humanity which He redeemed. His spirit is still among us, offering the gift of that perfect life. It is by

faith that we men individually receive it. For faith is just that movement of the whole being, impelled by the will, which lifts our life into touch with His. When by faith we thus bring our lives into union with His, then His life fills ours, as the spring fills the stream, purifying, strengthening, enriching. He enters our being as the abiding source of full, true, God-centred life. This is the crowning gift of the love of God. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish but have eternal life."

"I am the resurrection." Being the life, He is the resurrection. For a life centred and united with God cannot die—it is an eternal thing, as God Himself. Death cannot touch it, for death is but the ceasing of the physical life, when its work is done and it has given all that God wishes it to give, to the perfection of the spirit. It is only when sin has identified life with the flesh, and imprisoned it within this present world, that death seems the dismal and final end. Where

sin is not, as it was not in Jesus, death is not the end; but only a change in the sphere of life—a change into a sphere higher and nobler. The life, therefore, which Jesus gives to us, which *is* within us by His Spirit, cannot be holden by death. "Whosoever liveth and believeth on me shall never die."

Does all this seem distant and abstract? Nay, it can be translated by each one of us into the simplest reality. When by the activity of faith, by constant prayer, by use of Christ's own appointed "means of life," by daily effort to follow His example, I am keeping my life in touch with His, I am here and now living in the eternal. I have that in me which is independent of death. The veil of my many sins may darken my eyes so that death seems strange and terrible, and the bands of this life, so close and tender, may enfold me so that it seems hard to tear myself from them, but if my spirit's ear, accustomed to discern His voice, is expectant of its call, I shall hear it sounding in the very chamber of death and summoning me by

name to come forth. And though bound hand and foot by grave-clothes, and the face bound about with a napkin, he that was dead shall come forth into the light.

IV. THE LIFE WHICH IS ETERNAL

The miracle of the raising of Lazarus contains the kernel of our Lord's teaching as to the future life. Put paradoxically, it is that that life is not future but eternally present. Our minds naturally dwell upon the future, and are ever prone to speculate about it in our ignorant human way, asking such vain questions as, Where shall it be? What shall it be like? But Christ checks and rebukes this tendency of the human mind by His impressive silence. Just those curious questions which rise instinctively to our lips are those which He refuses to answer. He will not let us think of the future; He bids us concentrate our thought upon the now. He offers no illumination of the secrets of the grave.

He offers Himself as the revelation and the gift of a life which is eternal. The true life of man is that which, here or hereafter, is centred in God. It draws from God its inspiration; it finds in God its reward; it consecrates all that it experiences to God; it seeks in everything fuller fellowship with God. Because it is thus ever cleaving to God, it is invested with His eternity. This was the life of Christ; this is the life which he gives by His Spirit to those who by faith are joined to Him. In Him it is in perfection; in us it is but in process. Whether in perfection or in process, it is the divine life eternal. He speaks of it not as duration in time but as reality in fact; not of its extent but of its intensity. Wherever in any man there is a spark of this true life, there is something eternal.

It is difficult to exaggerate the loss to all Christian living and thinking which has come through the common reversal of Christ's teaching. He turned the mind away from the thought of "an everlasting future," and

sought to fix it on the thought of an eternal now. Men have speculated about the former and neglected the latter. They have thought of "heaven" as a future place rather than as an eternal condition of being.

Hence the life which is to be lived now has been left meagre and thin, because men's minds have been busied with the fancied perfections of a life hereafter. Eyes straining after the visions of the future have failed to recognise the glorious possibilities of Christ's now. Christ Himself has been conceived rather as the Giver of a future happiness than as the Giver of divine and eternal life. We have to bring our natural tendencies of thought back to the word which He spake at the tomb of Lazarus. We have to lose Martha's vague speculations about the resurrection at the last day, and to find instead the abiding truth in Jesus' answer, "I *am* the resurrection and the life."

It is doubtless for this reason that no word has reached us, if it was ever spoken, of the secrets which Lazarus brought with him from

the tomb. Robert Browning, in his wonderful poem, has endeavoured, with a skill and an insight which only he could command, to describe the later life of Lazarus—the life of a man who had once lifted the veil of death, and beheld the mysteries which it conceals. It is the picture of a life bewildered, full of perplexing cross-purposes, "witless of the size, the sum, the value in proportion of all things," looking on the world with eyes adjusted for eternity. It is a poet's fancy, but it helps us to understand why Jesus refused to unlock the secrets of the future. We could not have borne them; they would have disturbed, distorted, not helped this stage of being in which God has placed us for our good and His glory. It may be that Lazarus was not suffered to remember the strange experience of these four days. It is certain we are not meant to weave vain guesses round it.

> Behold a man raised up by Christ!
> The rest remaineth unrevealed;
> He told it not; or something seal'd
> The lips of that Evangelist.

For myself, it is enough to know I have a life in Christ to live, and in Christ the power with which to live it. In proportion as am seeking my own will, sinking to a lower standard than my best, loving what is trivial and ignoble, then I am living the sort of life which, as it is not from and towards God, is apart from Him, will sever me from Him, will lead to death. If I am really seeking in all things, in all experiences and efforts, to do the will of God, "to be the best that I can be," to love the highest that I can reach, then I am living here and now the eternal life. This is Christ, the perfect life, realising Himself in me, inspiring, guiding, sustaining my spirit by His. He will not let any part of my life perish that thus belongs to Him. If I am to think of the life after death, I am to think of it, not as a wholly new existence in some distant sphere, but as the continuance of my best life here, only purified from the corruption which taints it, purged from the sins which have stained it, freed from the temptations which thwart it. "Christ my

life"—if this be the inspiration here it will be the attainment hereafter. If I know this, I need not ask for further knowledge.

And for others it is enough to believe that when there is any part of the life which God can own as His, because it is seeking somehow the goodness, beauty, truth which He is, God will keep it, will purify and perfect it. Christ Himself has even taught that it may not be consciously derived from Him, or lived for His sake. In the parable of the Judgment of the Nations, the life which He owns, the life of service and self-sacrifice, is spoken of as a life which was not yet conscious of Him. Here is a hope large enough to trust. If a man deliberately shuts God out of his life, refuses the good and follows the evil, then of his own will, which God will not force, he loses the life eternal and chooses death. Here is a fear dread enough to make us pray and labour without ceasing for the salvation of men. This hope, this fear, must suffice us; it is not God's will that we should speculate beyond them.

V. THE PROSPECT OF DEATH

Yet I must die. Even if I lay the hold of trust upon the words of Jesus, "Whosoever liveth and believeth on me shall never die"; even if I know that my life, so far as it is lived for God and in union with Christ, is eternal; the strange experience of physical death must come to me. How am I, in the light of Christ's teaching, to face the prospect of it?

It must surely be with solemnity—with a solemnity amounting almost to dread. Not a terrified shrinking, but a deep, reverent sense of the awfulness of finding my spirit alone with the Holy God. To pass out of the flesh to which my spirit has been bound by a thousand ties, so that I can scarcely imagine myself without it, to leave finally this present scene of earth and sky and work and friends which has wound itself round me by associations so close and tender,

> As though my very being had given way,
> As though I was no more a substance now,
> And could fall back on nought to be my stay
> (Help, loving Lord, Thou my sole refuge, Thou !)

to go forth alone into another and an unknown stage of my immortal destiny—this is a prospect which only callousness of soul can view without the deepest awe. The thought of death must ever bring solemnity into the thought of life.

But yet the thought is still to be of life—that is our Lord's teaching. We are not morbidly to dwell upon the details of death or attempt to describe to ourselves in morbid fancy the course of its experience. The prospect of death is to solemnise, but not to chill or appal. If I shrink from imagining my life severed from the flesh and the solid earth and the warm reality of love and friendship, then let me the more earnestly turn from self to Christ. He has gone through the dread experience—He has come forth "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." He is with me now, closer to me than flesh

or world or friend. When these are going or have gone, He will be with me still, a light in the darkness, a stay in the strangeness, a presence known and loved in the loneliness, a life seen in the midst of death. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me." If I dare not think of myself in this overwhelming experience, I can think of Him; and in my thought of Him, the fear of death has no place. He *is* the resurrection and the life; death has no dominion over Him. If only day by day and, please God, at the last hour, my will is still set on His and the hand of my faith still touching Him, then through Him, the perfect life, I can overcome not only the power, but also the fear of death. Thus the prospect of death may help me to grasp and make my own the gift of eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord.

THE WAY OF LIFE

St. Mark vi. 56

THE WAY OF LIFE

St. Mark vi. 56

We have been trying to discern a certain Way of Life set firm in the midst of the thickets of difficulty, the wastes of uncertainty, the stones of stumbling, the flat plains of daily duty, the pitfalls of temptation, the valleys of humiliation, the high hills of desire, through which man has to make his journey. We have tried to see in the miracles of Jesus of Nazareth marks by which we can know and follow that way of life. They have given us scattered impressions of the manner in which the Son of Man treated human nature, healed, ordered, guided it. Let us try to gather these scattered impressions together into the unity of the central truth from which they radiate.

It is vividly presented to us in the picture which St. Mark draws of the divine Healer surrounded by sick and needy humanity. "Wheresoever He entered, into villages or into cities or into the country, they laid the sick in the market-places and besought Him that they might touch if it were but the border of His garment: and as many as touched Him were made whole." Men of every variety of place and kind, united only in one common need of strong and healthy life, pressing around a brother-man, out of whom that life flows in response to every touch of faith, reviving and restoring—that is the picture which comes back to us from these days of long ago. But it is a picture which represents a lasting truth. It is itself, like the acts which it recalls, a *sign*. These bodily diseases were the simplest manifestations of that disorder and distress which sin, ignorance, and the perplexing condition of man's destiny on earth have brought into human life.

The soul in all its aspects and energies is

conscious of its sickness. Straining after a vision of the good and the true, the spirit realises the blindness which darkens its gaze. Eager to press along the way of conscience, it finds that it is halt and lame, it stumbles and falls. The ear, anxious to hear the voice of God, is deafened by the tumult of the world's discordant noise; the cries of the traders in the market-place, the babel of debates in the schools, the chatter of the street, the shouting of rival factions, the siren-calls of pleasure are ever sounding and arousing bewildering inward echoes. The hand, stretching itself forth to work and help, drops impotent, sick of a palsy. The mind, tossed and troubled by conflicting thoughts, yet always seeking some unity of conviction, cries out in despair that it is "legion." Go where the soul will, in whatever ways of duty or pleasure, work or idleness, it is ever haunted by the Shadow of Death. From village and city and country there flows perpetually this so pathetic stream of sick humanity.

Yet ever in its midst stands a Supreme Personality—calm, patient, constant. Beyond all question, in the breadth and persistence of His hold upon the mind and heart of mankind, among the sons of men He stands—the Son of Man. You may remember the striking words of Charles Lamb, with which he broke in upon the talk of his friends, as they were discussing the greatness of the world's great men. "I will tell you what it is—if Shakespeare were to enter this room, we should all stand; but if Christ were to enter, we should all kneel." Man's instinct knows his Master. Theories of the meaning of His Personality rise and fall, but its spell remains. Those who come to Him and touch Him with the faith which ventures to trust that spell, find that from Him there passes into them an influence which restores their sight, guides their conscience, opens their ears, nerves their hands with power, and brings order, sanity, unity into their distracted minds. It is true, they only touch the border of His garment. None of them can fully understand the whole

mystery of His Presence: none can appropriate to himself the fulness of its power. It is only at the point where He meets their special need of Him that they apprehend Him. But, if they touch Him there, their whole life gradually gains a new health and joy and power: they are made whole. They find His words true—"I am come that ye might have life, and that ye might have it more abundantly." Following Him, they discover with ever-deepening conviction, that they too are finding the secret of the way of life.

Mysteries remain unfathomable, insoluble; but I can trust the light of this single and supreme disclosure of God's love and man's life to guide me through them. I must take my stand somewhere, and choose some vital conviction as to the meaning of this universe and of my place within it. It is the conviction that Jesus, born at Bethlehem, is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life." That is the summary of all the scattered thoughts which have tried to express themselves in

these pages. However feebly and unworthily set forth, they will not have been wholly in vain if they enable writer and reader to pray with deeper faith and more earnest will, "O merciful Jesus, who when Thou tookest upon Thee to deliver man didst not abhor the Virgin's womb, vouchsafe ever more to dwell in the hearts of us Thy servants. Inspire us with Thy purity: strengthen us by Thy might: make us perfect in Thy ways: guide us into Thy truth: unite us to Thyself, and to Thy whole Church: that we may conquer every adverse power and may be wholly devoted to Thy service and conformed to Thy will; to the glory of God the Father. Amen."

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